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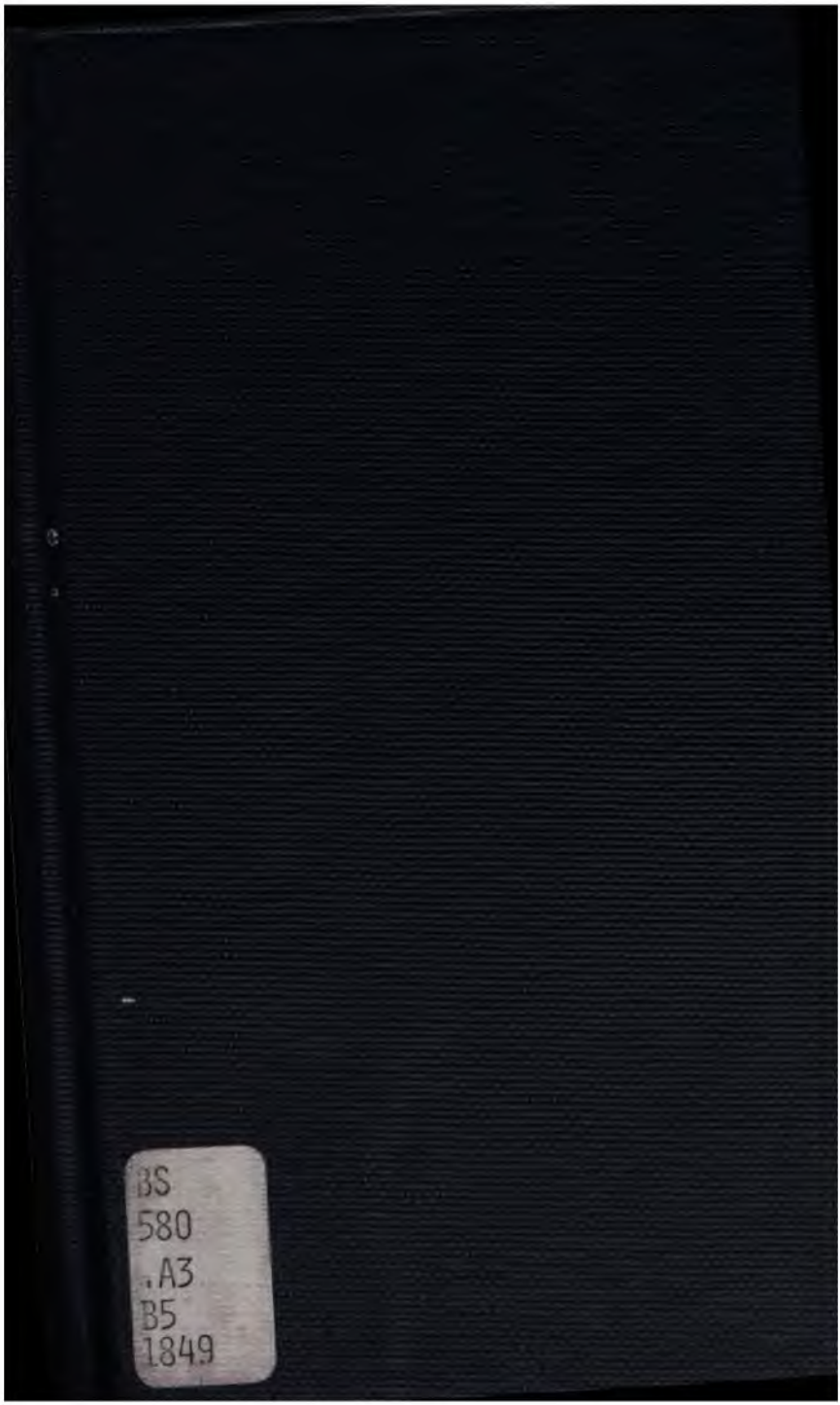
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TWELVE LECTURES

UPON THE

HISTORY OF ABRAHAM:

BY THE LATE

REV. HENRY BLUNT, A.M.,

RECTOR OF STREATHAM, SURREY;

LATE FELLOW OF PEMBROKE COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE; AND DOMESTIC CHAPLAIN TO HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF RICHMOND.

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PREFACE

TO THE FIRST EDITION.

In offering another unpretending little work to the notice of the public, the Author has great reason to express his gratitude to God for the undeserved and unexpected success with which the former volumes have been favoured. That this success ought to have commanded greater diligence upon the present occasion, he is ready to admit; while he is at the same time bound to confess that increasing occupation in ministerial engagements, equal in importance to the more public duties of the pulpit, has

very much withheld him from such additional attention as he could most earnestly have desired to bestow.

On this, as upon former occasions, he would disavow all claims to originality of exposition, to depth of criticism, to beauty or elaborateness of composition; his single attempt has been to speak plain truths in plain language; to convey to the hearts of the poorest and most uneducated of his hearers, by the aid of the Spirit of God, the doctrines and precepts of Scripture, as illustrated in the life of a faithful servant of God.

Coveting, earnestly the largest portion of the blessing of the God of Abraham upon this most feeble instrument of good, and desiring to be content with the smallest portion of human approbation which may be awarded to it, the Author commits his little volume to the

press, with many prayers for the spiritual benefit of those into whose hands it may fall, and for the advancement of the glory of that Saviour whom he would desire to serve.

Chelsea, May, 1831.

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LECTURES.

LECTURE I.

GENESIS xii. 1.

"NOW THE LORD HAD SAID UNTO ABRAM, GET THEE OUT OF THY COUNTRY, AND FROM THY KINDRED, AND FROM THY FATHER'S HOUSE, UNTO A LAND THAT I WILL SHEW THEE."

THE history of Abraham is, on many accounts, one of the most interesting and instructive which the pencil of inspiration has ever drawn. The sacred historian has entered more into detail, has appeared to dwell longer upon the prominent features of the character, and has given us more pictures of the domestic life and manners of this patriarch than of any other. He

has indeed occupied a larger portion of the sacred volume upon this single narrative, than upon the whole history of the world, from the creation to the time of Abraham. Nor shall we be surprised at the remarkable pre-eminence thus afforded to the subject of our present consideration, if we remember that Abraham was selected by the Almighty in an especial manner, and for an especial purpose; no less indeed than to be the progenitor of a people to whom God should peculiarly reveal himself, whom he should invest with knowledge and privileges far above all other nations, to whom alone, he should, for a series of ages, commit the divine oracles, and of whom, "as concerning the flesh," the Messiah of God should come.

The life of so remarkable a person, therefore, as related to us by Moses, cannot but be an object of interest to all:—to the literary man as the only authentic history of a great and powerful

prince, the fabulous accounts of whom he meets with in the early literature of almost every nation of antiquity; for[1] the ancient Persians, the Hindoos, the Jews, the Lacedemonians, and the Arabians, all unite with ourselves in celebrating the name of Abraham;—to the Christian as a minute and circumstantial history of a man of God who was honoured with the closest and most wonderful intercourse with the great Jehovah, whose life was regulated by that principle of living and influential faith, which he desires to be the one constraining principle within his own bosom, and who has obtained a portion so near the throne of the Most High, that to lie "in Abraham's bosom," is only another term for heavenly happiness and eternal bliss.

The first mention which is made of Abram in holy writ, is in the 11th chap-

[1] See Townsend's Chronological Arrangement, &c., *in loco.*

ter of Genesis, where we learn that he was the son of Terah, and born in Ur of the Chaldees. At the period when he was born, it does not appear that the knowledge of the true God was retained in its purity, by any single nation, or even by any single family among the sons of men. At the death of Noah, which occurred only two years before the birth of Abram, the unadulterated worship of the God of the Bible appears to have become almost extinct, for even the family of Abram, and, in all probability in his earlier years, Abram himself, were idolaters. Of this important fact in his history, we are informed in the book of Joshua,[2] "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood (the river Euphrates) in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: AND THEY SERVED OTHER GODS."

It was while living thus in his father's

[2] Joshua xxiv. 2.

house, and not until he had attained the age of seventy years, that we are informed in the 11th chapter of Genesis, with the brevity of Scripture history, that "Terah took Abram his son, and Lot his son's son, and Sarai, his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife, and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees to go into the land of Canaan, and they came into Haran, (or Charran,) and dwelt there, and Terah died in Haran." Had this been all that was recorded, we should have been left completely in doubt whether this removal from the idolatrous country in which he was born, were the spontaneous act of Abram's father, or a revelation of the divine will to Abram himself. By a reference, however, to the succinct account of the history of their forefathers, with which Stephen commences his address to the Jewish Sanhedrim, in the 7th chapter of the Acts, we find that "the God of glory APPEARED unto Abraham BEFORE he dwelt in Char-

ran," and gave him the order for the removal of himself and of his family, so briefly recorded by Moses. This then was the commencement of that astonishing intercourse between the great Jehovah, and his faithful and obedient servant, which obtained for Abram the honourable appellations of "the father of the faithful," and the "friend of God." Whatever might be the nature of this appearance of the "God of glory" referred to by Stephen, it was obvious that it was such as to satisfy Abram of the reality of the command, and of the truth, and power, and faithfulness of Him who delivered it. It was not yet however fully obeyed; Abram and his father and family had left the land of the Chaldees, but had proceeded only to Haran, still three hundred miles distant from Canaan. Whilst they tarried at Haran, Abram's father died; and, it appears from the opening of the 12th chapter, that the command was again repeated to Abram

in the words of the text, with the accompanying promises: "I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."

The immediate consequence of this declaration was, that Abram, although so far advanced in life that he might not unnaturally have expostulated against such a renunciation of his country, his kindred, and his home, at once obeyed the divine command; for we are told, "So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken," "and took with him Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran: and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came."

It is essential that at the commencement of a history from which we trust, by

the aid of the divine Spirit, to derive much Christian edification and improvement, we should learn rightly to estimate the nature of that principle which formed the one great spring of Abram's conduct, the motive of every act of holy obedience which marked his eventful life.

This, happily, is not left to conjecture, for the apostle to the Hebrews expressly says, "BY FAITH, Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, OBEYED, and he went out, not knowing whither he went."

His obedience then is at once declared to be the obedience of faith, the fruit of his entire trust in the promises, and dependence upon the word of that God, at whose command he went forth.

But before we can make any practical application of this to our own case, we must inquire still further into the nature and extent of this faith, that we may learn whether it be such that we our-

selves may by divine grace be made partakers of it.

Abraham believed, then, without hesitation and without reserve, all that God had revealed to him—that he should become a great nation; improbable as it was, "he against hope believed in hope," and "staggered not at the promise through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; being fully persuaded that what he had promised, he was able also to perform;" that God "would bless them that blessed him, and curse them that cursed him;" that "he should be a blessing;" and above all, as the paramount mercy of the promise, that in him, *i.e.*, in his seed, even (as the Apostle to the Galatians[3] explains it) in Christ Jesus the Lord, who should descend from his loins, all the families of the earth should be blessed.

We cannot profess to determine with what degree of clearness these wonderful

[3] See Gal. iii. 6, 8.

truths were presented to the mind of the patriarch, but they were so presented, and with sufficient accuracy to be savingly received and duly appreciated, and to become as a mainspring of action most powerfully influential, we cannot doubt, without at the same time doubting the express declaration of our Lord himself, when he said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to SEE MY DAY, and he saw it, and was glad." We believe, therefore, that in the words of this promise, a prospect, however imperfect and indistinct, was laid open to the eye of the patriarch, of the "DAY" of the Redeemer, of the time when he should come in the flesh, as a Son of Abraham, and by his one great sacrifice, bless for ever all the families of the earth, from the children of Adam to his last descendant; and we are corroborated in this view by that declaration of the apostle to the Galatians;[4] in which he expressly states that "faith was

[4] Gal. iii. 8.

preached before the Gospel unto Abraham," when it was declared to him, "In thee shall all nations be blessed." We believe, therefore, that faith in that astonishing declaration of the Most High, a prospective faith in the only Saviour of the world, was the feeling which bound the heart of Abram to his God; which made it a matter of the most perfect indifference to him, what he should leave behind him, from whom he should separate, or whither he should go, if the Lord were his guide, and if an interest in these "exceeding great and precious promises" were indeed his own.

We have thought it necessary thus fully to consider two very essential circumstances in this opening page of Abram's history—1. The nature of Abram's obedience; and, 2. The faith from which it sprang—because we believe that in the word of God, there are both commands and promises addressed to all to whom that word is sent, to induce them to act in a

manner remarkably similar to the father of the faithful himself; while we still further believe, that it is only by possessing Abram's faith, that we shall be able to imitate Abram's obedience, or with him be willing to yield to the command, and to appreciate the promise of the Most High.

I shall proceed, then, to endeavour to establish this assertion by pointing out, that there is in the word of God the strongest line of demarcation drawn between God's people—not his professing, but his believing and obeying people—and the people of the world; that from the latter, from their sins and their follies, their pleasures and their pursuits, there is as decided and distinct a command to come forth and be separate, and as positive a promise attached to the obedience of this command, as there was to Abram to leave the land of his nativity. "Love not the world," says St. John, "neither the things that are in

the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." "Be ye not unequally yoked with unbelievers," says the apostle to the Corinthians; "for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

It is vain to say, as persons do often affect to say, that this command was peculiar to the first ages of Christianity, and that the world applies only to the world of Gentile idolaters. Had this been the view taken of it by our Church, she never would have required from her

members so distinct and positive a promise, still to "renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil," putting them all upon an equality, and thus decidedly and unequivocally condemning "the pomps and vanities of this wicked world," which form the very attractions which the people of the world at the present day, and in every Christian country, love the most dearly, and leave the most reluctantly. A separation then, "in the spirit of your mind," from all these things, is commanded in Scripture, is enforced by our Church, and must be conscientiously aimed at by every sincere believer who is desirous to walk in the footsteps of his father Abraham.

This is, we are aware, too often considered "a hard saying," and one against which the heart rebels more resolutely, and the world clamours more loudly, than against almost any other: but it admits of no compromise, no qualifying; it is the word of God, and as

such must be received entire, or rejected entire. It is not left to you to embrace the promise and to modify the command; they stand or fall together. If you are of the world, the world will love its own; you will be acknowledged, and courted, and flattered; but then you must be prepared to stand with the world and fall with the world; for "the friendship of the world is enmity with God," and his unerring word is pledged, that "the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God." If, on the other hand, you will "come out and be separate;" if you are willing to be as the word of God describes the people of God, "a peculiar people, zealous of good works," "the world being crucified to you, and you unto the world;" the word of God is equally strongly pledged that you shall be received and acknowledged, loved and directed, guided and supported here, and "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation."

Believing these to be the plain and positive injunctions of holy writ, and at the same time knowing them to be most foreign to the feelings of the natural man, how, as the ministers of God, are we to act towards you our hearers? Are we to "prophesy smooth things?" Are we to say—"It is true that you promised in your baptismal covenant to 'renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil,' but this only alluded to gross enormities; the pleasures of the world can only become dangerous from excess, and with regard to its 'pomps and vanities,' the measure of them which you enjoy is extremely harmless: be content, therefore; remain where you are; God will not require so painful a separation; continue the double service in which you are engaged; and while your heart is partially engrossed by the world, give to God all that you can reasonably afford Him of your time, your affections, and your talents, and he will require no

more?" Can we speak thus, my brethren? Ought we, if we love your souls, to hazard, for the sake of a little short-lived popularity, these jewels of inestimable value? No; better, far better, that we should become your enemy by speaking the truth; better that we should become, with the apostles before us, "as the off-scouring of all things," than that we should jeopard one soul committed to our charge, by modifying the terms of that message with which our divine Master has intrusted us.

The present is an age of great religious profession; it is no longer considered discreditable, as it might have been some few years since, to be seen scrupulously attending upon all the divine ordinances, or even to be known to read the Bible, and to pray in private. Thanks be to God, the increased and increasing growth of these things has comparatively silenced the scoffers; and a man may now serve God, if not without the secret

contempt of the ungodly, at least without their open ribaldry and scorn. All ranks and all classes have, in this favoured country at least, felt the powerful effects of that "little leaven" which is slowly but certainly leavening the whole mass, and preparing for the bright display of that meridian sun which will, in God's good time, throw its quickening beams into the darkest corners of this dark world of ours.

But while this is matter of real and heartfelt gratitude to every sincere follower of our Lord, it is not unaccompanied by its peculiar dangers and temptations. Many who, when a profession of vital godliness was more proscribed and ridiculed than at present, united with its enemies, and re-echoed the vapid joke, or joined in the empty sneer, are now found swelling the ranks of its nominal admirers. It is therefore more incumbent than ever upon ministers to state clearly, and beyond the

possibility of misapprehension, what the Gospel really requires of its followers upon this point; and it is incumbent upon the true and sincere friends of the Gospel, by their entire and visible and decided separation from the world of the ungodly, by their habitual conformity to the example and image of their divine Master, to evidence to all men that "they are not of the world, even as He was not of the world."

You will not, my Christian brethren, even now be enabled to do this consistently and conscientiously without exciting the remarks and, it may be, the censures or the ridicule of the foolish, the ungodly, and the profane. And although persecution is too strong a word to apply to the species of opposition to which you will be called, be assured there will be still much to prove your resolution, to try your faith, to exercise your love. You will sometimes find difficulties and opposition even from those to whom

you are the most closely connected, and from whom you reasonably expect to receive approbation and encouragement; but this must not be permitted to arrest or to deter you. When Abram first proposed to his relatives and friends his projected departure from the scenes of his childhood, the associates of his youth, the friends and counsellors of his maturer age; when he declared that he was about to turn away, and for ever, from all that interested and gratified those around him, what do you imagine must have been the feelings of his auditors? When he told them that he was about to seek a country of which he knew not even the name—in fact, of every particular of which he was utterly ignorant, except that the Almighty had pledged his word to conduct him thither, and that his own dependance upon his God assured him it would be worth his labour;—do you not think there must have been many an incredulous smile, many a secret sarcasm, many an

open remonstrance? And in what manner was Abram able to meet these trying circumstances? He could avail himself of no argument to combat the objections of his friends, of no representations of worldly aggrandizement to silence their scruples, for he knew comparatively nothing of the enterprise in which he was engaging: but this he did know, that "He was faithful who had promised," and upon that simple dependance he acted, and would have been content to act, though a world in arms had opposed his progress.

So must it be with yourselves. It is vain to talk of giving up the world, of separating from its follies, of renouncing its sins, until you have, as the apostle expresses it, "obtained like precious faith with him, through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." Without this, every step will be difficult and laborious, and in the end futile and disappointing. But once acquire, through

the power of the Holy Spirit, freely offered to all who seek him, a full and complete dependance upon the word and promises of God, upon the merits and righteousness of your Redeemer, and all will be easy. With the love of God shed abroad in your heart, and the desire of obeying him here, and of living with him for ever hereafter, in full possession of your mind, no self-denials will be too great, no sacrifice too costly. Like Abram, you will be content to separate, "in the spirit of your mind," from every allurement which would detain you from the heavenward journey; and, like him, in obeying the command, you will inherit the promise, "I will bless thee, and thou shalt be a blessing;" you will not indeed necessarily become great and affluent, but then "the little that the righteous hath is better than the riches of the ungodly," and you shall assuredly be a blessing to all around you, as a son, a husband, a father, in fact in every relationship in life. Once

having taken the decided step of declaring yourself for God, in opposition to the idolatry and follies of the world, you will be surprised at the daily and hourly manifestations of His providence and love, in diminishing your difficulties and sweetening your labours. You will find indeed that the yoke of Christ is easy and his burden light. For every evil companion you forsake, He will raise you up Christian friends; for every worldly pleasure you relinquish, He will present you with spiritual joys; and should you ever forfeit the countenance and affection of those who ought to encourage you on the heavenly road, He will himself be more, infinitely more, than they have ever been, or can be to you—your father, your counsellor, and your abiding and ever-present friend.

What more can you desire?—that the end of your journey should be prosperous? Do not for a moment doubt it. No; He who only promised Abram to

show him the land, has promised you that it shall be your own; He will never leave you or forsake you until He has carried you to the haven where you would be; for your Lord has said, and He will bring it to pass, "Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory."

LECTURE II.

GENESIS xii. 7, 8.

"THE LORD APPEARED UNTO ABRAM, AND SAID, UNTO THY SEED WILL I GIVE THIS LAND; AND THERE BUILDED HE AN ALTAR UNTO THE LORD, WHO APPEARED UNTO HIM. AND HE REMOVED FROM THENCE UNTO A MOUNTAIN ON THE EAST OF BETHEL, AND PITCHED HIS TENT, HAVING BETHEL ON THE WEST AND HAI ON THE EAST: AND THERE HE BUILDED AN ALTAR UNTO THE LORD, AND CALLED UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD."

IN our first lecture on the history of Abram, we beheld him, in obedience to the divine direction, leaving the land of his nativity, and going forth into a land which God had promised to show him.

This was at present the whole extent of the promise regarding the land of Canaan; God had promised to show it to him, and he had fulfilled his promise, for we are

told that Abram came into the land of Canaan, and "passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh." The "place of Sichem" was that spot which was rendered famous in the next generation by the well of Jacob, and is known by every Bible reader as the Sychar of the New Testament, where the Saviour of the world, "wearied with his journey," sat upon this well, and conversed with the woman of Samaria. It was about the middle of the land of Canaan, so that Abram had travelled over a large portion of his future inheritance, without receiving even a hint from the Almighty that this was the land which the Lord had promised to show him. In addition to this trial of Abram's faith, we are told that "the Canaanite was then in the land," an idolatrous and warlike people, the presence of whom must have tended to render the journey of the patriarch still more arduous and painful.

When, however, Abram had reached

Sichem, we are told that "the Lord appeared unto him, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land." The promise was now for the first time revealed to him, that the land was not merely to be shown to him, but given to him; and of this he was assured by the express word of God himself. It may not be unnecessary to remind you, that in all these instances in the Old Testament where it is explicitly stated, that "God appeared," so that there was some visible manifestation of the great Jehovah, independently of the shechinah, or divine glory, the difficulty of reconciling such appearance with the declaration of our Lord Jesus Christ, that "no man hath seen God at any time," is easily and scripturally surmounted by all who hold the true and catholic doctrine of the real divinity of our ever-blessed Saviour. He it was, even the second person of the Holy Trinity, who thus from time to time manifested himself, and in all probability

in human form, to Adam and to Abram, and to Jacob and to Moses, and by this means kept up a continual expectation among the sons of men, of the time when he should in a still more remarkable manner take our nature upon Him, and dwell with us. It seems by no means impossible that the traditionary accounts of these primeval appearances of the Son of God, may have been the ground-work of the fabulous statements of the incarnations of their imaginary deities, which we meet with so frequently in the Hindoo, Grecian, and Roman mythologies. He then, even God the Son, appeared unto Abram, and promised that all the country through which he was travelling should be made over to his heirs for ever. No sooner had this astonishing annunciation been revealed, than we read, "there builded Abram an altar unto the Lord who appeared unto him."

This is the first time in the history of Abram, that any act of worship or

sacrifice to the Almighty is recorded; doubtless, it was a thank-offering to express his gratitude to God for the promise He had just made of the land of Canaan to Abram's posterity, and to mark, at the same time, his entire and unhesitating belief in it. The same circumstance is again recorded in the following verse: after Abram had advanced still further through the country, and arrived at Bethel, "there builded he an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord." According to an eminent[5] Hebrew scholar, this might have been translated, "in the name of the Lord," in which case it would open to us a very beautiful development of the nature of Abram's faith; that he called upon Jehovah "in the name of the Lord," who had appeared unto him, even in the name of the Son of God. Marking by his sacrifice, and his prayer upon the sacrifice, his prospective faith in the one great

[5] Dr. Gill.

atonement which should be offered for the sins of the world, and "in the name" of Him who should offer it.

It is extremely important that these acts of the social and public worship of Abram should be recorded, as a most valuable example to all the true children of Abram in every age and clime.

Consider for a moment the peculiar circumstances of Abram at the time he thus publicly performed them. He was travelling as a great prince, surrounded by a very numerous retinue, for we hear shortly after of "his three hundred and eighteen trained servants, born in his own house," and he was passing through a country, the inhabitants of which were idolaters. How instructive, then, must have been the example thus held forth by the father of the faithful. Whenever he stopped, though it were but for a night, there he was seen, unawed by the opposition, undaunted by the ridicule of the idolaters around him, building his tem-

porary altar, assembling his family and his household, and together offering their sacrifices as types of the great atonement, and together worshipping the only true and living Jehovah.

It is not improbable that this was one of the motives of the Almighty for calling Abram to a life of such continual and painful travel; for if we trace the journeyings of Abram, we shall find that, in the course of them, the great majority of the nations then upon earth were visited by this man of God; that he was, in fact, the first Christian missionary, preaching the Gospel, and living the Gospel, in the sight of the inhabitants of the world. We consider that there is no anachronism in asserting this, for we find St. Paul declaring that Moses "esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt;" and that the Gospel was preached to the Israelites in the wilderness, as well as unto us.[6] Thus the

[6] See Heb. xi. 26, and Heb. iv. 2.

Almighty "left not himself without a witness," for every part of the earth through which Abram passed possessed the edifying opportunity of beholding the worship of the true God in its purity, and of viewing those sacrifices which were appointed to keep up in the mind of the spiritual worshipper, a perpetual reference to "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

There is something singularly interesting in this view of the motives and intentions of Abram's life of travel; it tends so greatly to exalt the mercy of the Most High towards his creatures, and to clear his justice in condemning these nations in after ages, for not[7] liking to retain God in their knowledge, and for their neglect of those mercies once so visibly and strikingly offered them.

But, my brethren, it is time that we should turn from these historical statements, to the more immediate applica-

[7] See Rom. i. 28.

tion of the example of Abram to our own business and bosoms.

You also are, like Abram, travelling through a country, the inhabitants of which are much given to the forgetfulness of the God whom it is your duty and your privilege to serve. Let me then inquire, are you in this respect following the example of that good man of whom we speak? The word of God has declared that "they which be of faith, the same are (in all ages and countries) the children of Abraham;" but then our Lord has added, "If ye were the children of Abraham, ye would do the works of Abraham." Let me then inquire: whereever you are, or however engaged, do you remember to honour God openly and unhesitatingly? It is easy to honour Him in the presence of his friends, but are you equally willing to do so, when in the society of his enemies? The great trial to Abram's faith was, that "the Canaanite was then in the land;" that

wherever he pitched his tent and erected his altar, there were the despisers of God to oppose or to ridicule. And in some sense the Canaanite is still in the land. Is this a matter of the same indifference to you that it was to Abram? and are you ready to declare yourself in favour of the commands and the ordinances, and the people of God, at all times and in all companies? When others neglect what you believe to be the will of God, do you persevere in the practice of it? When others disparage those whom you, in your heart, believe to be the people of God, do you defend and support them? In these respects the cowardice, or rather the faithlessness, of men is perfectly astonishing, even to those who know the weakness of our fallen nature.

There is, however, a very striking evidence twice given in the text to the faith and courage of Abram, which it is my intention, in the remainder of the present discourse, to adopt more pecu-

liarly as a test of our own. We have seen that he never pitched his tent, even for a night, without erecting an altar to God, and assembling his numerous household to the worship. Are you, then, my brethren, equally careful in the observance of this great duty? Do you erect in all your dwellings the family altar, and assemble your households, and together call upon the name of the Lord? or are you strangers to this important and valuable duty? Do you content yourselves with your own devotions, and leave your family and household, those whom God in his good providence has brought beneath your roof, to live, and, as far as depends upon you, to die in ignorance of Him "whom truly to know is life eternal?" If this be so, it is our painful duty to assure you, that as Christian masters of families, you are neglecting a very important branch of your duty to your Master which is in heaven. He who is "no respecter of persons," will

require an account from you of every soul committed to your charge. He will ask—"While under your roof, had they the opportunity freely offered them of attending the house and sacraments of God? Were they ever spoken with upon the importance of these things? Did they ever hear the word of God read? Were they ever assembled for the purpose of family prayer?" These are inquiries which will one day be made of you:—will you reply to all or any of them in the negative? Will you say—"It is true, I was the master of a Christian household for ten, twenty, thirty years together: but I never thought it necessary during that time, that as a family we should bow the knee to Thee, or name together the name of Jesus."

My brethren, these things ought not so to be; you cannot offer one reasonable and satisfactory excuse why they should be so: you will not tell that God who seeth in secret, that you have no time for

these duties, that you cannot spare one quarter of an hour, morning and evening, for God; that you cannot rise sufficiently early in the morning, and that in the evening the nature of your amusements, and the hours they compel you to keep, would ill harmonize with the observance of such religious duties. Can you, in your conscience, believe that the God of heaven and earth will be so mocked? You do not believe it—it is impossible; you would not venture upon such an excuse to him. O do not pretend to satisfy yourselves with so shallow and so false a subterfuge!—yes, we are compelled to say, so false a subterfuge. The real reason often lies much deeper; an unholy shame of being accounted too earnest in religion, of paying more respect to it than the rest of the world; or a consciousness that family prayer would be too much at variance with your present mode of life, and would sit awkwardly and uneasily upon one who was

living, and desirous to live, as those around him live, to ease, to pleasure, and to sin; or, though last, perhaps the greatest, the fear of the world's dread laugh, which is often omnipotent where the fear of God is, alas! powerless:— these too frequently are at the bottom of this neglect of God in our families. What will the world say? what will my friends think? are motives sufficiently strong in many minds to resist the plainest dictates of duty, or to disarm the strongest compunctions of conscience. My brethren, believe me, they will not always be thus guiltily powerful; there is a time coming, when you will be yourselves surprised that the fear of the world, or the love of the world, was ever permitted to weigh with you, even as the light dust upon the balance; when all that you might have done for God, will appear far, far too little; when all that you have neglected to do for him, from the paltry considerations to which we

have alluded, will form a subject of everlasting astonishment to your own soul; and when those solemn words of our Redeemer will assuredly be fulfilled, "Whosoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father with his holy angels."

Cut off therefore at least this one source of self-condemnation: delay no longer to erect the family altar, and to "call upon the name of the Lord;" to read the word of God to your household, to confess together before God as a household your family sins, to acknowledge together your family mercies, and to petition together for family blessings.

Where this is done regularly and conscientiously, it is seldom without its immediate reward, in the advancement of domestic union and harmony, and in the promotion of an increased feeling of religion in yourself and in your household.

Duties such as these indeed, when faithfully performed, will not and cannot want a blessing, because they will not and cannot stand alone. They will, under the divine teaching and guidance, lead you carefully to review the whole tenour of your life and conversation, and to compare it with the dictates of that book which you esteem of sufficient authority to present before your assembled family. When you read, day after day, in the hearing of your children and domestics, that many of those things which are most "highly esteemed among men are abomination in the sight of God:" that "all things are naked and open before Him with whom we have to do;" that "banquetings, revellings, and such like," are classed in the word of God with "murders, drunkenness, and adultery," as among those works of the flesh of which "they that do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God"—you will, perhaps, by God's blessing, be led to ask yourself

respecting many of the pursuits and pleasures in which you now thoughtlessly engage, "Am I not contradicting, by my life, what I am daily reading with my lips? How can I act as a priest of the living God in my family, and then go forth in the morning to the daily duties of life, in an unchristian, unholy, or uncharitable spirit? Or, how can I return at night from the society of the thoughtless, the worldly, or the profane, or from those places in which the name of God is habitually blasphemed, by the sinful and ridiculous associations in which we find it, and with senses impaired by fatigue, or excited by conviviality, or distracted by vain and thoughtless company, hope to draw near with acceptable feelings to the domestic altar, or take the holy word of a perfectly pure and heart-searching God within my lips?"

These are considerations so solemn, and at the same time so undeniably scriptural and true, that we cannot but feel

assured that if they were allowed their due weight, and followed out to their just and reasonable conclusions, they would, under the divine blessing, tend most materially to raise the tone of Christian feeling and conduct throughout our congregations. The clear and positive and scriptural duty of family prayer would be no longer neglected; your servants would again become what they now have, in too many cases, ceased to be—an integral portion of your families, regarded by their masters, and regarding them with feelings of affectionate fidelity in return. Your children would see that you practised what you heard, and really thought God worthy to be served at some little sacrifice of ease and self-indulgence; and you yourselves would possess the inward satisfaction, that if a demoralizing, revolutionary, infidel principle be indeed spreading through all ranks and orders of men, you had, at least in your own little sphere, not hesitated to stand in the

gap, and to stem the tide which is breaking up the foundations of society, and which, although yet at a distance, may shortly be upon our own shores. The blessed consequence would be that the promise of God would be fulfilled to us, "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him."

Family worship, however, great and important as it is, is not the only public duty towards God, to which I would endeavour to incite you by the example of him whose history we are considering; for it by no means stands alone among the number of obvious and neglected services. Bear with me then a few moments longer, while I endeavour to impress another duty upon your memories and your hearts.

You have assembled this day in God's house of prayer and praise, and you are invited to draw still nearer to Him at that altar which commemorates the dying love

of the Redeemer, and presents to us his body broken and his blood poured forth for man. Here then is another command, which, as Christians, you cannot doubt, and yet of which, alas! so many are neglectful. Why, let me ask, are any of a Christian congregation, except those whose professional duties oblige them, absent when we assemble round the altar of Christ? Do we not all acknowledge, and ought we not all to love, the same Saviour? Ought we not all to be looking to the same blood to cleanse, the same righteousness to clothe, and the same Spirit to sanctify us? Should we not all equally tremble at the thought of being excluded from the same table hereafter? Why do we then make a separation here?

YOUNG MEN: is it because you possess some feelings of a false and unholy shame at being seen to be so engaged? We honour the scruples of a tender conscience, however mistaken; but we are afraid that too many have no better and

no wiser reason than this false shame, for absenting themselves from a duty equally binding upon all. When the "Canaanite was in the land," then, you would not have stood with Abram at his altar: you will not be found ranged on the Lord's side in the day of battle; neither then can you hope to be among his people when they rejoice in the day of his great and final victory, "as men rejoice when they divide the spoil." Or must we attribute your absence to another motive? Is it because the licentiousness of your habits in private tells you too plainly and too truly, that while you thus live, the altar of the Lord is no place for you? O, if it be so, pray, earnestly, faithfully pray, that God may grant you a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within you.

YOUNG WOMEN: why do you absent yourselves from the table of the Lord? Is it because you have suffered the trifles, the worthless trifles of the world, vanity, pleasure, dress, so to occupy your thoughts,

and hearts, that you have no real feelings for these high and heavenly ordinances, no heartfelt love for Him who appointed them? If it be, may He whom you have forgotten, "open your hearts," by the gentle influences of his grace, as he did the heart of Lydia of old, to "attend to the things" "belonging to your peace, before they are hid from your eyes."

MEN OF BUSINESS AND OCCUPATION: why do you absent yourselves from the table of the Lord? Is it because your whole time and thoughts are so engrossed by the perishing things in which you are engaged, that you have never yet even so far reflected upon the purpose for which you were sent into the world, as to feel that you are sinners, and to fly to the Saviour for relief? May it please God to write these solemn words upon your consciences—"What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul: or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

PERSONS ADVANCED IN LIFE: why are you absent? Is it because you have so long neglected this ordinance, or the Saviour who instituted it, that you cannot rouse yourselves from your lethargy, though the opening grave be yawning at your feet? May you be brought to know that the "hoary head is a crown of glory" only "when it is found in the way of righteousness!"

My beloved brethren, I do not, God knows, say these things in bitterness of spirit, but with a single, heartfelt desire for you and for your salvation. I would, if your time would permit, address you thus separately and individually, and would ask you all and each, why you thus trifle with a positive command of your dying Lord, the obligation of which I am certain not one among you would venture to dispute?

But it is enough. I will not urge you to that as a mere command, which you cannot perform acceptably and profitably

unless you regard it as one of your highest privileges and choicest blessings. Once obtain by the prayerful application of God's good Spirit, a real abhorrence of sin, a sincere love for the Saviour, a disregard for the opinions and a disrelish for the sinful pleasures of the world, and there will be no need to urge, to expostulate, or to entreat. Like Abram you will never pitch your tent without erecting your altar, and offering up your sacrifices of praise and prayer in the midst of your assembled household; you will never hear the invitations to the table of the Lord, without rejoicing in the opportunity it affords you of drawing still nearer to the God of all your mercies. You will look forward to the day of the Lord, and the house of the Lord, and the supper of the Lord, as the bright spots in our earthly pilgrimage, the green and tranquil resting-places in your weary journey, where you may "with joy draw water out of the wells of

salvation;" and to you, communion with your Redeemer, whether in private or in public, in his word or at his table, will be the looked for, longed for, anticipations of an intercourse which shall never fatigue — of a communion which shall never end.

Duties such as these indeed, when faithfully performed, will not and cannot want a blessing, because they will not and cannot stand alone. They will, under the divine teaching and guidance, lead you carefully to review the whole tenour of your life and conversation, and to compare it with the dictates of that book which you esteem of sufficient authority to present before your assembled family. When you read, day after day, in the hearing of your children and domestics, that many of those things which are most "highly esteemed among men are abomination in the sight of God:" that "all things are naked and open before Him with whom we have to do;" that "banquetings, revellings, and such like," are classed in the word of God with "murders, drunkenness, and adultery," as among those works of the flesh of which "they that do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God"—you will, perhaps, by God's blessing, be led to ask yourself

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privation and toil? In moments such as these, my brethren, and there are few to whom such moments come not, believe that the suggestion is the voice of your soul's worst enemy, of him who never counsels but to ruin and to destroy; close your ear to his delusions, and open your heart to your Redeemer: tell Him your difficulties and your troubles, and in his strength, "forgetting those things which are behind, press forward to those which are before;" the dark and lowering season will soon be over, the sky will clear, and the bow of promise will again be seen in the cloud.

To encourage you to perseverance, under the most discouraging aspects, remember that one of the highest testimonies borne by the Spirit of God to the faith of the patriarchs, in the New Testament, is grounded upon their conduct in seasons such as this. "If they had been mindful," says the apostle to the Hebrews, "of that country from whence they

came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned;" that which we are considering was precisely one of those opportunities. "But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly, wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for he hath prepared for them a city." When therefore, in a spiritual sense, "the fig-tree does not blossom, and there is no fruit in the vine;" when you have, like the patriarchs of old, not only opportunity, but strong temptation to return; when the pleasures of life assume their most fascinating garb, or the business and occupation of life their most engrossing aspect, and endeavour to win back the vantage-ground in your mind's affections, from which the Spirit of God has driven them; like Abram, resolve to forget the country whence you came out, and to press forward only with greater ardour, and more enduring perseverance, to that better country, even the heavenly, which

is promised you. With the eye of faith fixed on the cross of your Redeemer, look calmly and cheerfully forward; "with him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." He is gone to prepare a place for you, where the joys will be infinitely superior to all the petty gratifications which are now so strongly contesting with Him the power to influence your heart; and most assuredly He will not desert you by the way: "in the end you shall reap, if you faint not."

It was during the period of Abram's short, but necessary sojourn in Egypt, that we find one of the few instances of the sinful fear of man, and faithlessness towards God, which marred the fair outline of his otherwise perfect character. The inspired historian, with that fidelity which always marks his pen, and which forms one of the great beauties of scriptural biography, invariably pourtrays the failing as accurately as the virtue, neither extenuating the one, nor emblazoning

the other. He recounts the painful fact that Abram, tempted by the danger to which he thought the beauty of his wife might expose him while sojourning among the sensual Egyptians, desires her to call herself his sister. An evasion, which, like most other deviations from the line of duty and of truth, only hastened the calamity which it was intended to prevent.

Some commentators[8] have taken great pains to prove that this was so common a mode of expression in those early times, and in those eastern countries, that there is little weight in the charge of equivocation thus brought against Abram. It appears, however, far more in accordance with the spirit of truth, in cases such as these, like the subtilty of Jacob, and the denial of Peter, to acknowledge at once that they were sins,—sins unjustifiable by any human reasoning, but yet susceptible of pardon through the blood of the atonement, and, as the event has proved, par-

[8] See Calmet's Dictionary, Art. Abram.

doned by the infinite mercy of God. He it is who alone hears the secret sigh, and watches the silent tear, and accepts the heartfelt contrition of which all human biographers must be for ever ignorant, and yet which form a large and blessed portion of the communion between a deeply penitent soul and its pardoning God. And therefore he it is who, while the world may remember with unkindly triumph the failings even of the most truly penitent believers, has himself, "for his own name's sake, passed by their transgressions, and will not remember their sins." It is not necessary that the repentance should in all cases be recorded even by the pen of inspiration; but it is necessary, in vindication of the truth of God, that the sins even of the holiest should not be suppressed, since they tend the more fully to establish, by the conduct even of the best of men, the truth of that Scripture declaration, which affirms that "all have sinned and come short of the

glory of God;" that "there is none that doeth good, no not one," not the father of the faithful himself; that we have but one example which we cannot follow too closely or copy too minutely, even the Lord Jesus Christ, for he alone was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners."

The famine in Canaan having ended, the patriarch returned from Egypt, where, as we have seen, he had taken up his temporary sojourn, and "went up, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south." "Abram," continues the inspired historian, "was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold; and he returned to Bethel, unto the place of the altar which he made there at the first, and there Abram called on the name of the Lord."

"How hardly," said our blessed Saviour—"how hardly shall a rich man enter into the kingdom of heaven;" yet here was one who was "very rich," and

yet esteemed the love of God and the service of God, his highest honour and his greatest wealth.

My brethren, you whom it has pleased God to call to the higher and more influential stations in society, I would earnestly desire you to remember, that in reviewing the life of Abram, we are reviewing the life not only of a very good man, but of a "very rich" and powerful man; one who, as the prophet expresses it, was laden with as much "thick clay,"[9] and beset by as many temptations, as (considering the different circumstances of society) the wealthiest among yourselves. Yet this rich man, in the midst of his abundance, still thought the service of God his chief good, and the hope of a better country his richest inheritance. Permit me, then, to apply the example of the patriarch more especially to yourselves; it is a valuable opportunity, and must not be neglected: we do not often

[9] See Hab. ii. 6.

read of the very wealthy ones of the world among the people of God, for we are expressly told, that "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called." Let me, then, inquire of you who are placed in the middling and higher classes of society, whether, although rich in silver and gold, you are content, with Abram and with Moses, to "esteem the reproach of Christ, greater riches than the treasures in Egypt;" whether you can truly affirm with the apostle, that you are willing to reckon "all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord," and to "count them but dung that you may win Christ, and be found in him?" Or, on the contrary, when riches increase, do you set your heart upon them? and are you fostering that most unscriptural and yet too common misapprehension, that the rich and the poor cannot be tried by precisely the same laws, and subjected to precisely the same penalties,

by Him who shall come to be our judge? Few, perhaps, will freely confess that they are thinking thus; and yet how often in society do we find a tacit acknowledgment of so unholy a proposition? that the same strict observance of God's laws and his sabbaths, the same self-denying application of the great truths of the Gospel, can hardly be expected from persons of rank and fortune, as from persons in poverty and obscurity; that the intrigues and the duels of the wealthy are sins of a very different colouring from the adulteries and murders of the vulgar: that the former have infinitely more temptations than the latter, and that, therefore, great allowances should no doubt be made for them.

If by this it be only meant that we, their fellow-mortals and fellow-sinners, should make the greatest allowances in passing an opinion upon their character and conduct, remembering that their difficulties and impediments are greater

than our own, the observation is most true, and few would desire to controvert it: we cannot be too cautious, too careful, too charitable in judging others, more especially when they are placed in high and responsible situations, that we may counteract the common tendency of the human mind to lower all that is great, and to detract from all that is above us, and that we may obey the apostolical injunction "not to speak evil of dignities." But if it be intended, as we fear it too often is, to encourage the belief that the UNERRING Judge will make these allowances, that God himself will admit of any such distinction; that the man who has been clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, will be at the last amenable to one code, and the beggar who has lain at his gate will be tried by another; we must beseech you to discard from you for ever so dangerous, so unscriptural a delusion. There is not the smallest hint of such

a doctrine throughout the whole range of the word of God. The danger and the difficulties, the burden and the temptations of wealth, are, indeed, largely and freely dwelt upon; but where shall we find its immunities? In the vain phraseology of human society, in the opinion of the world, who possess, or are striving to possess it, but not in the word of God. These are all equally dealt with now, as all shall be hereafter; "God is no respecter of persons;" He does not enlarge the strait gate, or widen the narrow way, to admit the wealthiest or the proudest of the sons of the earth: the emperor and the beggar must resort to the same "fountain open for sin and for uncleanness," and shed the same bitter tears of penitence, and live the same life of holy self-denial, or they will not meet at last in the same gracious presence, or rejoice together throughout the same blissful eternity. Let me then entreat you, to whom I am now more espe-

cially addressing myself, not to shelter yourselves behind such transparent sophistries, as the allowances which the opinion of the world chooses to make for the sins of the wealthy and the great. The eye of God, and the voice of God will reach you behind so thin a screen, as they did our first parents when hidden among the trees of the garden; and such excuses will only increase the danger and condemnation of those who trust in them.

It is at the present time, more than it has ever been in our memories, essential that you, my brethren of the higher classes, should hear the truth plainly and unequivocally stated; and they only are your true friends who will unhesitatingly reveal it to you. While I endeavour, however imperfectly, to do so, believe me that I do it with feelings of the most sincere reluctance, lest my motive should be misapprehended. I should regret the results to which I point, as

deeply and as bitterly as yourselves; but I believe that these results are more likely, under Providence, to be prevented, by a bold and honest warning, than by a timid and time-serving suppression of them.

It has been said, that if truth were driven from the dwellings of men, it ought to be found in the hearts of kings. May it not be said with equal propriety, that if a plain and fearless mode of speaking be banished from every other place, it ought to take refuge in the pulpit? If we the ministers of God, be content to speak unto you smooth things, to prophesy deceit, where shall you seek a monitor who will venture to deal plainly with you?

The times in which our lot has been cast are not common times; they are times when knowledge and civilization have travelled down to the extremest limits of human society: when the lower classes, in intelligence and even in edu-

cation, are following closely upon the footsteps of their superiors, and, as one of the evils necessarily attendant upon this new order of things, erroneously imagine themselves qualified to judge of the character and conduct of those above them. The natural consequence of this is, that the day when imposing titles and high-sounding names could awe the multitude into obedience, and frown the observers into respect, is passing rapidly away for ever. Old customs and institutions cease to be venerated because they are old, and rank ceases to be respected because it is powerful. The sentiments of men are undergoing a visible and most fearful change; every thing is now brought to the bar of public opinion —a tribunal which, while it boasts of emancipating itself from the fetters of ancient prejudice, has neither sought nor desired to seek the more hallowed influences of restraining grace—while they who sit in judgment there, are no longer

the lettered or the titled few who for centuries had esteemed it their own prescriptive privilege, but the thousands and tens of thousands by whom the lower departments of life are crowded.

Is it not then evident, (for my desire is not to dwell upon the general question, but its personal application,) that you also, if you are anxious to retain your stations in the respect and sympathies of society, must advance with the times? You must produce, in addition to those claims which you now possess, and which to every well-thinking mind will always be respectable, a far more availing title to the love and veneration of your inferiors. You must take your stand upon the strong ground of our common Christianity. You must show by your respect for the name, and the ordinances, and the word, and the Sabbath, of our God, that you esteem the title of a child of God your highest rank, a holy obedience to the will of God your most im-

perative duty, and the favour of God your greatest privilege. You must evidence, by your regard for the best interests of your poorer brethren, for their spiritual as well as temporal improvement, by your sympathy in their sorrows, by your ready and liberal kindness to their necessities, that you are not ashamed to acknowledge the near and intimate relationship which subsists between you; that you indeed love the same Saviour, and for his sake are anxious to do them good.

Such a change, blessed be God, is unquestionably making its way through the middling and higher ranks of society. God grant that it may be sufficiently rapid in its progress, and extensive in its operation, to avert, under Divine Providence, those events which it requires no prophetic vision to discern upon the wings of the coming times. Over this we have no control; but it is our duty, as ministers, to express our solemn convic-

tions upon so important a topic, and it is no less your duty than your interest, as hearers, to pray to the Spirit of God to carry the application of them to your own hearts; that you may each for yourself learn experimentally the comfort of this great Bible truth—that, whether in the darkest hour of public danger, when the judgments of God are abroad in the earth, or in the most trying moments of personal or family affliction, there is but one unfailing source of strength and consolation, but one refuge from the storm, one covert from the blast, one shelter from the tempest: in the words of the wise man, "The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous runneth into it and are safe."

LECTURE IV.

GENESIS xiii. 8.

"AND ABRAM SAID UNTO LOT, LET THERE BE NO STRIFE, I PRAY THEE, BETWEEN ME AND THEE, AND BETWEEN MY HERDMEN AND THY HERDMEN; FOR WE BE BRETHREN."

THE points of interest, which we have hitherto considered in the history of Abram, have been those chiefly which regarded his belief in, his dependance upon, and his obedience to his God. The incident which we are now approaching is one which will present the patriarch to us in the details of domestic life, in the common transactions between man and man; where we shall have the opportunity of observing whether his daily conduct and temper were in unison

with that high character for spiritual attainments with which the writers of inspiration have invested him. Happy would it be for the Christian world, if its professors of all ranks and in all ages could bear the scrutiny so safely, and come forth from the investigation so unimpeachably, as the father of the faithful.

Abram had, as we have seen, returned from Egypt into Canaan with all his family, and accompanied by Lot, his nephew. Both Abram and Lot had now become extremely rich; their flocks and herds covered the face of the country, and their servants born in their house and dwelling in their tents, formed of themselves no inconsiderable multitude.

Such wealth could scarcely be expected to exist long in any family without producing its usual results, dissension and division between those who fear not God, and trial and disunion even between those who are the most closely

allied to him. We are accordingly informed, "that the land was not able to bear them that they might dwell together; for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together. And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abraham's cattle, and the herdmen of Lot's cattle."

It does not appear that the strife had reached to the heads of the respective families, but it had commenced with the domestics: and instances have not been wanting in later times, when feuds thus begun have kindled, not only individuals and families, but even clans and nations into war.

It was then that the practical nature of Abram's religion began to be developed. That we may place it in the strongest light, let us for a moment consider the manner in which a man of the world would have acted upon such an emergency, and then mark the gratifying and instructive contrast. Would he not have

argued thus?—There can be no question that if the land will not maintain our whole company, it will at least maintain me, and all that belong to me; let therefore my nephew seek for himself, what I have already found, and what has been in so peculiar a manner promised to me. I have both the right to claim, and the power to maintain that right, and though I would willingly do every thing that is equitable and kind, it cannot be expected that the elder should yield to the younger, or that I should undervalue the promises or gifts of God, by being so unnecessarily ready to transfer them to another. If strife or hostility be engendered, the peril be to him who awakens it; I have wherewithal to defend myself, and to punish my opponents.—Such would have been unquestionably the opinion of nine-tenths of mankind, and so prevalent is this selfish mode of reasoning and acting in the world around us, that we scarcely feel that there would have been any thing for

the worldly man to animadvert upon, had this been the language and conduct of the patriarch himself. Let us then hasten to contrast this with what were indeed his language and conduct upon this important occasion; "Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren." Of how widely different a spirit from those to whom we have alluded, must he have been possessed, who could thus speak upon a subject of considerable aggravation: "Let there be no strife; for we be brethren." When we look around us in the world, who would believe that the same relationship, and therefore the same blessed motive for peace, still exists among its inhabitants? When we see the quarrels and the coldnesses, the lawsuits and the strifes, between those who are not only bound by the common tie of Christian fraternity, but by the closest and most indissoluble

bonds of affinity and blood, are we not tempted to inquire, can these men indeed be "brethren?" Can they be all trusting to the same hope of salvation, and expecting, or even desiring, to dwell together in the same heaven? It is impossible: with such divisions of heart and affections, with such bitterness of feeling and expression, the same eternal mansions could not contain them; the very tranquillity of heaven itself would be broken up if they were admitted there; heaven would be no heaven, if it were a place where so many differing brethren, of so many differing families, were all to congregate together in one eternal abode.

But the kindness of Abram did not exhaust itself in a courteous speech, or evaporate in mere expressions: he thus proceeds with almost unexampled tenderness and humility to address his younger and far less amiable kinsman, "Is not the whole land before thee?

separatethyself, I pray thee, from me; if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right, then I will go to the left." What forbearance, what generosity, what true nobility of mind was here! Abram, standing on the confines of a country far exceeding in fertility that through which they were passing, does not for a moment regard the difference, or claim, as he might have done, from the expressed promise of the Almighty, the whole for himself: he does not, as all must allow he would have been most fully justified in doing, even claim for himself the priority of choice; he waives every right, and gives up every pretension, in favour of one far younger, and less deserving, humbly contenting himself with the portion which Lot should leave him. Well did our Lord declare, "Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God." And yet, alas! how little of this spirit is

there upon earth! To give up a single point, to yield upon a single question, although you know yourself to be in the wrong, is in the opinion of the world, rather a mark of pusillanimity and weakness, than of common honesty and candour; while even among sincere Christians such a concession is considered as no slight triumph of principle: but to yield when you are confessedly in the right, to give up your claim, when justice, reason, equity, and the power to maintain it are all upon your side, this is so rare as to be rather matter of tradition that such things have been, than among the every-day occurrences of the Christian's life that such things are. Yet how completely was this the principle upon which Abram acted, and which the God of Abram commends!

My brethren, would you desire—and who is there that would not desire—to emulate so lovely a character? There is only one method in which it can be

achieved; there is only one principle from which an habitual consistency in all the amiable qualifications of life can flow: "Let that mind be in you, which was in Christ Jesus;" "Let the love of Christ constrain you." The sweetest natural disposition may be soured by disappointments or impaired by unkindness, or expire amid the pains and disquietudes of sickness, or the peevishness and fretfulness of age; but the forbearance, the affectionate and feeling regard for others, the ready postponement of our own interest or wishes to theirs, which flow not from the mere blessing of a naturally even temper, or the comforts of a well-organized body, or a well-balanced mind, but from a heart renewed by the Spirit of God, from a mind deeply imbued with the love of Christ, from an habitual imitation of his blessed and perfect example, will never fail you.

We do not mean to say that the most sincere Christian may not be betrayed

into momentary harshness or hastiness of expression, that you will never utter an uncharitable word, or be guilty of an unkind action; but we do mean to assert that these will be exceptions, the few and rare exceptions, while with the living principle of the Spirit of Christ within, and the beauteous model of his perfect character without, you will never habitually and designedly err on the side of selfishness, unkindness, or uncharitableness.

Strive, then, my Christian brethren, as far as in you lies to take away the reproach which has been unjustly cast upon the Christian name and profession by the worldliness, the injustice, the rapacity, or the cruelty of some of its professing followers. Who can tell how deeply, even in his own person, the cause of Christianity may have suffered from the existence of feelings such as these? Is it not grievous to reflect, that at the last day there may be many of those who shall be

cast forth into outer darkness, to whom we may ourselves have given cause to make this most true but unavailing complaint: There was a time when I was seriously disposed to have inquired into those doctrines which the religious people of my day professed; but when I sought their more intimate acquaintance, for the purpose of learning their opinions, and examining their practice, I found them so widely at variance, so much of love in their creed, and of hatred in their lives, of harshness and uncharitableness towards others, of differences and divisions among themselves, that I shrunk from a closer connexion with them, and remained in that ignorance and disobedience which will now receive their justly-merited reward, and condemn me to the blackness of darkness for ever.

Earnestly then let me exhort you, each within the circle of his own little influence, to present to the eyes of the world the Christian character in all its spiritual

harmony and beauty; "Put on as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye:" showing forth in your life and conversation, the "fruits of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." Demonstrate that you are indeed the children of Abram, by evincing the same peaceableness and self-denial, the same kindness and urbanity in the every-day transactions of common life; "doing to all men as you would they should do unto you:" and "in lowliness of mind esteeming others better than yourselves." Carry the spirit of your divine Master, the conformity to the revealed will and character of your God, not merely into his temple with you, but into your occupations and your

retirements; into your counting-houses, and your dwelling-houses; into the duties of every day, and the domestic intercourse of every hour: these are the tests, the only true and genuine tests, of your religious profession; for be assured that "he that loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen." "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him."

No sooner had Abram made to his nephew the kind and liberal proposition upon which we have been speaking, than we are informed that Lot immediately accepted the offer of priority of choice; and without a single feeling either of that gratitude which might have led him to return the offer to his uncle, or that delicacy which might have taught him to content himself with the inferior portion of the territory around them, grasped at once at the proffered kindness, and "chose for himself all the plain of

Jordan," the best watered and most fertile portion of the land.

With the history of Lot, with his ingratitude, his selfishness, his covetousness, if these were at this time features in the character of him, who was afterwards spoken of as a sincere and upright man of God, we are not concerned; but as the nephew of Abram, as one for whom we shall find the patriarch hereafter most mercifully and successfully interesting himself, it may not be irrelevant to remark, that this was the first false step which led to a life of the most trying and harassing vicissitudes. Lot, now separated from the company of a man of God, from the benefit of his ordinances and his altars, his precepts and his example; and for the sake of earthly abundance, voluntarily betook himself into the neighbourhood, and finally into the closest companionship and intimacy, of those who knew not the Lord.

My younger brethren: you whose happiness it is, in whatever station of life you are, to be placed at present within the instructions and the privileges of a religious family, think gratefully of this blessing, and reflect seriously before you consent to forego or separate from it. Be assured that the very society of God's people is no common blessing, and their ordinances and altars no common privilege.

If the providence of God have placed you in the lower ranks of life, and I would here especially address myself to domestic servants, be very careful how you permit any prospect of superior temporal advantages to induce you to relinquish the benefits of living in a family conducted upon truly Christian principles. If you are freely permitted to attend divine worship, and, as far as your necessary occupations will admit, to hallow this sacred day; if you have the comfort and the benefit of family

prayers, and if these Christian advantages be duly appreciated and improved by you, you may be convinced that the blessing of God may rest upon you in an especial manner while beneath that roof. Be not therefore in haste, for any imaginary advantages, to leave it. While you evince your thankfulness to God for placing you there, show also, by practising all good fidelity, by the strictest honesty and most respectful obedience, your gratitude to your employers. As John the Baptist said to the soldiers, "Be content with your wages," and "meddle not with them who are given to change." You may, and doubtless will, find some difficulties and privations in every situation,—so would Lot had he continued with Abram,—but infinitely less distressing and more endurable than those which succeeded his separation. Take warning then by his example, and let it be no trivial advantage in the future, no slight trial and inconvenience in the

present, which shall tempt you to forsake a family in which you are treated as if you possessed an immortal soul, and were preparing for an eternal inheritance.

It must have been a most sincere and heartfelt grief to the aged patriarch, to view his young relation thus readily withdrawing from the tents of his uncle, and to find himself deprived of the company and society of one whom he had brought from a land of idolatry, and taught to acknowledge and worship the great Jehovah. This, then, was the period selected by the Almighty to renew in a peculiar manner his promises to Abram. "The Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever."

How striking an instance is this of the considerate kindness and tender mercies

of Him with whom we have to do! At the moment when Abram had been making the greatest sacrifices for peace, at the time when he was most remarkably demonstrating how loosely he sat by the richest earthly abundance, compared with the desire of approving himself to God, the Almighty visits him with a fresh manifestation of his presence, and comforts him with renewed assurances of his future inheritance. And does not the experience of the Christian still evidence to the same compassionate dealing on the part of his Almighty Father? If you, my Christian brethren, are ever led to acts of painful self-denial; if, for the sake of peace, for the honour of God, or the glory of his name, you ever willingly forego any worldly advantage, or deprive yourself of any temporal gratification, how sweetly are you recompensed, how amply are you repaid, even at the present hour, by the increased enjoyment of closer and more

intimate communion with your Redeemer, and by a sense of his approving presence and his all-seeing eye! How completely does he thus accomplish his own most gracious declaration, "There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake or the Gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this present time, and in the world to come eternal life."

Thus, also, when those whom you have loved and cherished here, in whose society you have delighted, with whom you have enjoyed the comforts of this world, or the far more blissful anticipations of that which is to come, when they are separated from you by unavoidable distance, or removed from you by the hand of death, how cheering to the eye of faith is the bright, unfading prospect of the future inheritance! At such times, how powerfully and how soothingly does the Spirit of God speak to the mind of the

believer! and when the soul is faint and the heart is heavy, say to you as he did of old to Abram, "Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art;" cease to dwell upon your present disquietude and losses; cease to "sorrow as men without hope;" "look from the place" where sin has tainted every comfort, and sorrow has darkened every prospect, and let the eye of faith cast its bright glance of hope and joy to the inheritance which is prepared for you. "For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it;" as surely is it for thee, if thou art an obedient believer in the Lord Jesus, as if purchased for thee alone; as certainly shall it be kept for thee, and thou for it, as if thine absence alone would mar the happiness of its ten thousand times ten thousand happy inmates.

In the darkest hour, therefore, of this world's most trying vicissitudes, dwell with humble hope upon the prospects of

this blessed, this glorious inheritance: it is indeed an enlivening and an elevating theme, one which more than any other tends to comfort the heart when broken, and to cheer the spirit when sorrowful. Consider those who are already there, who have all passed through the same trials, been subject to the same infirmities, and bowed beneath the same sorrows as yourself. The thoughts of that glorious inheritance, of "the recompence of the reward;" of Him, whom having not seen, they loved, and with whom they longed to be for ever dwelling; of that blissful country where Jesus reigns, and where sin and sorrow, and death and trial, are alike unknown—were the thoughts which gladdened their hearts and dried their tears while engaged in the same pilgrimage as yourselves. Let them also be the thoughts to cheer your labours and silence your regrets. Survey "the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it;" for if you are indeed a believing and obey-

ing servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, although the poorest, the lowest, and the most undeserving, to thee will God assuredly give it. Reflect how immediate the hour of your actual possession of this rich inheritance may be—how near it must be; and may "the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing;" with all comfort and consolation now in the prospect, and with all certainty of happiness hereafter in the fruition, of that blissful country in which those "who die in the Lord shall rest from their labours," and rejoice in his immediate presence from everlasting to everlasting.

LECTURE V.

GENESIS xiv. 18.

"AND MELCHIZEDEK, KING OF SALEM, BROUGHT FORTH BREAD AND WINE; AND HE WAS THE PRIEST OF THE MOST HIGH GOD: AND HE BLESSED HIM."

THE next incident in which we find Abram engaged, differs remarkably from all that have preceded it. The patriarch was pre-eminently a man of peace, willing, as we have seen, to sacrifice every worldly advantage rather than interrupt that harmony which he knew to be so essential to the honour of his religious profession, and so entirely in accordance with the will of his God. On the present occasion, however, we find him assuming the character of the warrior, placing himself at the head of a numerous body

of his servants, and waging a short but successful conflict with the princes of the warlike tribes among whom he sojourned.

We are informed by the inspired historian, that four of the neighbouring princes had made an inroad upon the cities of the plain, in one of which, even in the accursed Sodom, Lot, the nephew of Abram, had now taken up his permanent abode; and having conquered the kings of those cities, they carried away as captives, Lot and his family, and all his goods. We may just remark in passing, how speedily the evil fruits of Lot's separation from Abram became apparent: he left this man of God, fearful lest his wealth should be diminished by the want of an abundant pasturage; and the very next mention that is made of him is, that he has lost everything which he so highly valued and so dearly purchased, and is himself an exile and a prisoner.

"Be sure your sin will find you out,"

was as completely verified in the history of Lot as in that of Jacob. The original act of duplicity in the latter was, as we observed while pursuing his history, returned upon him by the duplicity of others in almost every important incident and every near relationship of life. The original act of covetousness in the former seems to have been equally visited upon Lot throughout the whole of his eventful and disastrous career; every trial appearing to be so appointed by the hand of God, as to touch him in this most tender point, until in the last stages of his career, from the possession of flocks and herds, so that the land was not able to bear him, we find him a poverty-stricken outcast, far from the fertile plains which had been so much the object of his ambition, closing his days in a cavern of the mountains. May we never be tempted to forget, my brethren, that the word of God has declared that "they who hasten to be rich fall into a temptation and a snare," for a

man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth, but in that blessed state of mind which teacheth us to "seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness," content with the smallest portion, and the narrowest prospects here on earth, if we be but "rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom."

No sooner, however, was the calamity in which Lot was involved communicated to Abram, than we read that "he armed his trained servants born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan. And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobab, which is on the left hand of Damascus. And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot and his goods, and the women also, and the people." This is the only instance recorded throughout the life of Abram of his engaging in any warlike expedition.

Much as we dislike the very name of war, and utterly unchristian and unjustifiable as we consider every species of offensive warfare, we cannot withhold our approbation of this truly disinterested action of the patriarch. To succour the weak, to relieve the distressed, to liberate the captive, were his only motives, and the comfort of an approving conscience his only reward; for we find that after having been blessed with the most signal success, the use which he delighted to make of the fruits of his victory, was to restore all that had been taken to their rightful owners.

It was while Abram was returning from this successful enterprise, that his interview with one of the most remarkable characters in holy writ took place. A character shrouded in the deepest mystery, and of whom the little we can learn is to be obtained rather by "comparing spiritual things with spiritual," and by throwing the light of other

portions of the word of God upon the obscurity of this dark passage, than by anything which is contained in the passage itself. The personage to whom I allude is Melchizedek, and all that is here related of him is as follows:—"And Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought forth bread and wine; and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth. And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he (*i.e.*, Abram) gave him tithes of all."

No further mention throughout the history of Abram is ever made of this remarkable person; but the next time we hear of him is in a place and in a manner which tend extremely to exalt him in our view, and to give him a pre-eminence over many other characters in holy writ, of whom far more has been recorded. It is in the 110th Psalm, that

Psalm which is dedicated to the prophetic declaration of the future glories of the Messiah, that the next mention is made of this extraordinary person: we are there informed, "The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." While the apostle to the Hebrews, to leave us no possibility of doubting of whom the Psalmist spake, expressly says, "Jesus made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek."

It is not the intention of these plain and familiar lectures, to enter either into the mazes of controversy, or into the depths of critical inquiry; I shall not, therefore, occupy your time by stating the various conjectures—and widely varying they are—to which the mysterious account of Melchizedek in holy writ has given rise. There is, however, one which, as it is favoured by some of our best commentators, it may be desirable to notice, viz. that Melchizedek was a personal ma-

nifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, and was himself the uncreated angel of the covenant. This is grounded upon that declaration of the apostle, in the 7th chapter to the Hebrews, which says that Melchizedek was "without father and without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life." There can be no doubt that these expressions are strictly applicable to none but our blessed Redeemer; they are, however, as we shall see, in a modified sense, applicable to the person of whom they were predicated, and whom, notwithstanding this remarkable description, we believe to have been a mere mortal, fashioned in all points like as we are. Indeed, it scarcely appears possible that Melchizedek could have been the Messiah in person, for the same apostle hath said of him, that "he was made like unto the Son of God," an expression of itself sufficient to show that he was not really the Son of God. We should therefore in-

cline to think that the account given of him by Josephus is the true one, viz. that Melchizedek was a Canaanitish prince, a pious and religious man, eminently raised up by God, and whose genealogy was kept a secret, that he might be in this, as in other things, a type of Christ.

It is for this purpose alone that he appears to have been introduced into the page of Scripture history; in all that is told of him, and in all that is left untold of him, he is equally a most remarkable type of our ever-blessed Lord; and we should therefore scarcely be justified if we were not to dwell a while upon those points of resemblance which the apostle to the Hebrews has so plainly recorded. "This Melchizedek," says the apostle, "was king of Salem." It is sometimes thought that the Salem of which Melchizedek was king, was in after-days the city of Jerusalem, which is called Salem in the 76th Psalm; but this is improbable, for the spot where the interview

between Abram and Melchizedek took place, was between Damascus and Sodom, while Jerusalem was nearly forty miles distant, and in a contrary direction; there is little doubt, therefore, that this Salem was the Salim of the New Testament, "near to which John was baptizing," which was precisely in the situation I have described, and in which, according to Jerome, very magnificent ruins were shown in his day as the palace of Melchizedek.

The apostle, speaking of his name, says that he was called Melchizedek, which is literally Melchi Zedek, the righteous king, or the king of righteousness: speaking of his title, the same apostle says, that "he was king of Salem," or king of peace, which is the literal meaning of Salem. In both his name, therefore, and his title, he was eminently a type of the Lord Jesus, of whom we are told by the prophet Jeremiah, "A king shall reign and prosper, and this is his name whereby

he shall be called, The Lord our righteousness;" and by the prophet Isaiah, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given," and "his name shall be called the Prince of Peace."

Again, as in his name and titles, so in his offices, was Melchizedek remarkably a type of our Lord. We are told by the apostle, that he was not only king of Salem, "but a priest of the most high God,"—offices in the earlier times not unfrequently united—and by this union he typified the kingly and priestly offices of our blessed Redeemer, of whom the Almighty declared, "I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion:" and again, "He is a merciful and faithful high priest," says the apostle, "a great high priest passed into the heavens."

It is important that we should never lose sight of this remarkable union of the kingly and priestly offices in the person of our ever-blessed Redeemer, so plainly pourtrayed in the types, and set forth in

the prophecies, of the Old Testament, and so remarkably demonstrated in the New. But be not content with the mere scriptural knowledge that the Lord Jesus Christ is indeed both priest and king: learn rightly to estimate the practical value of such an acknowledgment; carry the inquiry to your own heart, and often ask yourself, Is the Lord Jesus Christ thus united in both these important offices to me? Have I received Him as my priest to atone for me, and my King to govern me? Unless both sceptres are freely offered him, He will not accept the proffered sovereignty. Where as a priest he has reconciled you to God, there as a king must he rule in your daily walk and conversation: where he has been received as a "king of righteousness," — bestowing an imputed righteousness which shall satisfy God, and vouchsafing a sanctifying righteousness by which you shall glorify God—there, and there only, will He come as "King

of Peace," with healing on his wings, pardoning, comforting, blessing, "keeping him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed upon God."

Proceed we still further to examine those points in which Melchizedek was a type of our Lord in what was not revealed of him, as we have seen him to be in that which was made manifest.

The apostle declares that Melchizedek "was without father, without mother, without descent," *i.e.*, the Holy Spirit purposely concealed his parentage, to make him a more perfect type of the eternal Son of God, than he could have been by any other method. For as Melchizedek was "without father," so also was our Lord in his human nature, being born of a pure virgin; as Melchizedek was "without mother," so was our Lord in his divine nature, being the Son of God by an eternal generation; as Melchizedek was "without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of

life," *i.e.*, in other words, neither his birth nor his death having been recorded, so did the Prophet Micah expressly say of our Lord, "his goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." He was thus literally, what Melchizedek was only apparently, without descent," "for He was in the beginning," and from everlasting, before time was created, and He shall be "to everlasting," when time shall be no more. "Who then," as the prophet asks, "shall declare his generation!" Melchizedek's descent was not declared, only that he might be the more perfect type of Him, whose descent could not be declared.

But let us turn from the name, and the titles, and the offices, and the genealogy, of Melchizedek, to his employments, and we shall find him still presenting the same striking and beautiful type of the true "king of righteousness" and "king of peace."

In the short passage in which Melchi-

zedek is presented to us, we read that he was engaged in three remarkable occupations. He received tithes of all that Abram possessed; he brought forth bread and wine for the refreshment of the patriarch and of his weary followers; and in a very solemn and peculiar manner, he bestowed his blessing upon the father of the faithful.

Leaving the consideration of Melchizedek receiving tithes of Abram, the object of which is most fully discussed by St. Paul in the seventh chapter of his epistle to the Hebrews, let us rather pass on to the two remaining actions of this remarkable personage, in the hope and with the prayer that we may derive something of personal benefit and consolation, by looking through the type to that blessed Being who is the great and glorious antitype.

We are told in the words of the text, that when Abram was returning from the slaughter of the kings, Melchizedek, as a king, met him, and brought forth bread

and wine to refresh and sustain him after the toils of the conflict. Now turn we to the illustrious antitype, our Lord and our Redeemer, and behold Him, as a gracious and all-powerful king, employed in the same merciful act of condescension and kindness to his weary followers. When you, my Christian brethren,—I would address myself to the experience of the Christian's heart,—during the toils of your pilgrimage, the conflicts of your warfare, are, like the soldiers of Gideon, "faint yet pursuing;" when you feel almost sinking beneath the repeated assaults of your spiritual enemies, and although you may have successfully repelled them, are still trembling lest you should fall before their renewed attack, how mercifully does your King, like Melchizedek of old, bring forth his bread and wine; the bread of his supporting and strengthening word, the wine of his heart-elevating promises, to cheer and recruit your drooping spirits!

Were it not for his blessed aid, how often ere this would you have sunk, wearied and exhausted, in the unequal conflict; how often would even the moment of victory, the most dangerous moment to the Christian, have been the moment of fatal and irremediable defeat; when the powers of darkness having been vanquished, the temptation successfully opposed, the evil spirit of self-complacency comes hovering upon the track of the retreating foe, and you, who had so lately triumphed, would, but for the aid of your all-merciful Sovereign, have sunk prostrate at the feet of the enemy.

Lastly: did Melchizedek not only as a king sustain and cheer the returning patriarch, but also as a priest, in the most solemn manner, bestow upon him his blessing? Behold again the gracious antitype, our Lord and our Redeemer, in the last scene of his mortal life, a life of suffering love, when, as a priest, He was about to "enter within the veil,"

"leading out his disciples from the holy city, and lifting up his hands and blessing them, and while he was blessing them, he was parted from them and carried up into heaven." How delightful is the thought to every humble follower of our adorable Redeemer, that the last time the Saviour, in his veil of flesh, was ever looked upon by mortal eye, the last time He mingled in matchless condescension with the church militant here on earth, He was thus graciously, thus mercifully, thus compassionately engaged in fulfilling his priestly office, in blessing his poor, forlorn, and helpless followers! How encouraging is the belief, that at the present day, and at the present hour, this is, and while time remains this shall be still his merciful occupation, that as a great High Priest he has entered into the holy of holies to plead for his people; for "He ever liveth to make intercession for us," ever liveth to bless with the tokens of his love, with the communica-

tions of his grace, each individual member of his redeemed and ransomed family. Nor is this all. It was not enough that his last act on earth should be an act of blessing, his present occupation still the same, but when He comes again, it shall be for the same most gracious purpose!

How glorious is the anticipation, that when time shall be no longer, when we shall see Him "whom having not seen we love," the first accents of his voice, upon the day of his long looked for, prayed for, wished for return, when he shall come surrounded by the Church triumphant, will still be the language of blessing! He shall come forth to bless his people, saying to each and to all who have denied themselves and taken up his cross, and in heart and affection, and life and conversation, followed Him, "Well done, good and faithful servants, enter into the joy of your Lord."

LECTURE VI.

GENESIS xv. 6.

"HE BELIEVED IN THE LORD; AND HE COUNTED IT TO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS."

WE concluded our last discourse with the consideration of Abram's interview with Melchizedek, upon the former's return from his successful expedition against the four kings. There was yet another, and almost equally remarkable interview, which occurred at the same time and place. "The king of Sodom," who had suffered so severely from the inroad of the four kings whom Abram had vanquished, "went out to meet him," and said unto him, "Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself." In other words, re-

store to me my subjects, who have been carried away captive, and whom you have liberated, and keep as a recompense, the flocks, and the herds, and the goods, which are justly the property of the conqueror. And Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have lifted up mine hand unto the Lord," (*i. e.*, I have sworn,) "that I will not take from a thread even to a shoe-latchet, and I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich." What another beautiful testimony is here given to the disinterestedness of the patriarch! He would receive no reward at the hands of an ungodly king of an abandoned and God-deserted city. But for the men that were with him, the three princes who had joined him in the conflict and the pursuit, "Let them," said Abram, "take their portion." They probably were not the followers of the God of Abram, and over them he desired to exercise no control; but for himself, he was firm and

decided that nothing of the goods of Sodom should cleave to him. He looked for his support and subsistence here, to the Lord, and to him alone; he knew that "his bread and his water should be sure." God had undertaken to provide for him—the Lord had provided, the Lord would provide—and Abram had learned to trust the word of God's promises, even where he could not trace the hand of his providence.

My brethren, would that we were able to say that the spiritual children of Abram acted at the present day in accordance with this admirable example. But is it not, on the contrary, continually brought as a charge against the professing Christians of our times, that instead of evidencing this unworldly and generous spirit, there are few who are more anxious to secure every possible temporal advantage than themselves; few who are more eagle-eyed after the emoluments of this world, or more in-

clined, I will not say to overstep the bounds of the strictest honesty in the acquirement of them, but to advance to the very limits of those boundaries? You, my brethren, who thus act, plainly demonstrate, that while you profess to trust God for the eternal salvation of your soul, that jewel of inestimable value, you cannot really trust him for the maintenance of the poor miserable casket which contains it.

Again, how often do we hear it said, that there is far more liberality, more openness of dealing, more disinterestedness among the high-minded people of the world, than among many of whom we may not doubt that they are the people of God. This is a distressing truth, but one which must not be suppressed. You excel the people of the world, my Christian brethren, upon every point which involves your duty to your heavenly Father, let it not be said that you do not equally excel them in

your duties to your fellow-men; let it be evident, that the graces of the Christian are as superior to the virtues of the man of the world, in the every-day transactions of life, as the Christian's motive is superior to the worldling's motive, and the joys of the Christian's heaven are superior to the pleasures and immunities of earth. And especially you, my poorer brethren, when you are tempted to relieve your poverty by any act of petty dishonesty of your own, or by sharing in the doubtfully-acquired property of another: or, if you fill the office of domestic servants, by what are termed in the language of the world, the perquisites of your station, but are, in the language of God, too often positive thefts; remember the upright, disinterested example of him of whom we speak; be "jealous over yourselves with a godly jealousy," lest you should put it into the power of your spiritual enemy to say hereafter, as the king of Sodom

would have said of Abram, I HAVE MADE THIS MAN RICH!

If you are a child of God, be assured you shall never want such a child's portion of the good things of this world, as a Father, who knows you infinitely better than you know yourself, thinks best for your own interests, and for his glory: rest therefore in faith upon the promise, that the Lord hath provided, and the Lord will provide.

It was "after these things," says the inspired historian, that "the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram; I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." Abram in all probability felt, that although he had thus surprised his enemies and been successful in this midnight encounter, there was no security against the future attack, and therefore, bold as he was, he "feared;" his heart probably quailed within him at the thought that he was an unprotected stranger in a

foreign land, that his vanquished foes might again return upon him, and that he might yet perish by the hand of his enemies. The fears which Abram felt on this occasion do not appear to have been expressed, but God knoweth the heart and all that is passing there, and therefore this was the moment that the Lord appeared to him,—"after these things,"—saying, "Fear not, Abram; I am thy shield."

How consolatory is it to the Christian to be thus assured that all the secret fears of his heart, as well as the outward afflictions of his lot, are equally known to God. "Let not your hearts be troubled," was the merciful address of our Lord to his sorrowing though silent disciples. Every secret fear, therefore, my brethren, is known to Him "from whom no secrets are hid;" and while you are trembling with anxiety lest you should still sink before your spiritual enemies; like David, lest you should still

"perish by the hand of Saul;" your Redeemer declares to you there is no cause for alarm, for "I am thy shield." However thickly the fiery darts of the wicked one may fall around thee, they shall not pierce thee while God is thy shield; "a thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee, for He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou be safe; his righteousness and truth shall be thy shield and buckler."

It is thus, as the Psalmist says, "our fathers trusted in God, and were not confounded." It is thus when you, my brethren, forego any unworthy advantage, when you renounce any worldly gratification, when you refuse any forbidden or dishonest profits, for the sake of Christ, you "shall in no wise lose your reward;" the Lord himself will be "the portion of your inheritance and of your cup, He will maintain your lot;"

however the world may frown upon you and withhold its capricious favours, or separate from you and deny its transitory aggrandizements, remember that there is One who hath said, "I am thy exceeding great reward." Wanting his presence and his blessing in the richest earthly abundance, you are poor indeed; but possessing Him, enabled by his Spirit to say, "Christ is mine," and your habitation, though it be but a hovel, will be the abode of contentment and peace; your heart, though it be often grieved by sin and oppressed by outward misery, will be "the temple of the Holy Ghost," and your spirit meetening, by all which happens here below, for an inheritance beyond the skies.

As soon as the Almighty had thus revealed himself to Abram, we find the patriarch availing himself of the opportunity of this personal communication with the great Jehovah, to remind Him of his promise, and to urge upon Him

its fulfilment. "And Abram said, Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing that I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed, and lo, one born in my house is mine heir." We observe in this remonstrance of Abram, perhaps something of the infirmity of our fallen nature, but certainly joined to an earnest and praiseworthy desire after the promised blessing. He does not indeed appear to doubt that God would make of him a great nation, and that "in his seed, even in Christ, all nations of the earth should be blessed;" but time was passing on, eight years had already elapsed since the promise was first promulged; and yet no signs of its fulfilment. Abram therefore pleads with the Lord; as if he had said, Thou hast just declared thyself "my exceeding great reward," and yet the promised seed is withheld, and I go down the vale of

years childless; and to the eye of sense it appears as if my faithful servant Eliezer, born in my house, were to be my adopted heir, and I were to lose the glory of being, in a still more literal manner, the progenitor of the great Messiah.

Behold how mercifully the Almighty bears with the infirmities of his people! He knew the heart of the patriarch, and therefore knew that his complaint was not the mere complaint of the natural man fearing to be written childless, but the earnest heart-felt longing of the spiritual man for a closer relationship to his Lord, a nearer affinity to that Saviour whom he had been already taught to believe in, to love, and to expect. Hesitate not, my brethren, to express feelings such as these to a compassionate God. When you find that, notwithstanding all the promises and all the ordinances which He has mercifully bestowed upon you, you are still far less closely united to

your Redeemer, your great and glorified Head, than you hoped and prayed and expected that ere this you should have been, it is a legitimate cause of complaint to the Most High; tell your difficulties unto the Lord, deplore before Him your distance, the coldness of your affections, the deadness of your heart, the unprofitableness of your sacraments and your prayers. Say with Abram, "Lord, what wilt thou give me?" what canst thou give me that can at all compensate for such a loss as this? Remember thy promises which have been ever of old; remember thy word upon which thou hast caused thy servant to hope; remember Him who has purchased me with his blood, whose I am, and whom I desire to serve; cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. If I am not "one with Christ, and Christ with me;" if thou givest me not Christ, an interest in his blood, a hope of his salvation, a place in

his kingdom, all that thou hast given or canst give, in comparison of what thou hast withheld, will be little worth.

God loves to be thus humbly but plainly reminded of his promises. He loves to see his children thus coveting, and "coveting earnestly the best gifts;" for what would it profit them if they were to gain the whole world, and yet lose their interest in the Lamb slain from its foundation? What will it profit you, if you abound to overflowing with this world's goods, and yet have not the blood of Christ sprinkled upon your conscience, his love and his Spirit within your heart? Abram's remonstrance entered into the ears of the Lord God of Sabaoth. For "behold the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, This (speaking of his servant Eliezer) shall not be thine heir, but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir." And having said this, the Lord led Abram to the door of his tent, and pointing to the

apparently innumerable stars which were yet glittering in the firmament—for this manifestation of the Almighty was made before the dawn of day—"Look now towards heaven," said God, "and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them; and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness."

It was thus that the Almighty listened to the anxious desire of his faithful servant, and again pledged himself more strongly than ever to the fulfilment of it; and it was thus that Abram was accepted before God by a simple reliance upon his promise, and obtained the name which has distinguished him in all ages of the world as "the father of the faithful." "He believed God," utterly improbable, considering his advanced age and the advanced age of Sarai his wife, as such a declaration must have appeared; he believed at once and un-

hesitatingly in the promises of the Lord, and God "counted it to him for righteousness." He believed that he should possess an innumerable progeny, that in his seed, *i.e.*, Christ, as the apostle tells us, all nations of the earth should be blessed; he believed therefore in the Messiah who should come, and so believing, his faith was, as the homily expresses it, "the hand which put on Christ," and therefore instrumentally justified him before God.

My Christian brethren, it is of essential importance that you should understand the method by which Abram was thus accounted righteous before God, not as a matter of mere historical research, or even of doctrinal inquiry, but as a matter of the deepest personal interest. The way of salvation has been one and the same from the creation of the world; "justification by faith only," is as evidently a doctrine of the Old Testament as it is a doctrine of the New, or

an article of the Church of England. Our Lord himself tells us, "Abram rejoiced to see his day, and he saw it and was glad;" by which he can only mean that Abram rejoiced to foresee the coming of Christ Jesus our Lord in the flesh, a crucified and glorified Redeemer, and the unspeakably great and blessed consequences of it. It was thus that Abram and all the patriarchs and prophets and spiritual worshippers of God under the old dispensation, believed with the fullest assurance of faith, on the person of the Messiah who should come, as every spiritual worshipper now believes on the Messiah who has come. The object of faith is in both cases the same, and the effect of faith is in both cases the same—justification and peace, acceptance and holiness.—"Being justified by faith we have peace with God," and the faith by which we are justified being a living and an operative faith, daily

evinces its fruits in "all holy conversation and godliness."

Earnestly, therefore, would I beseech you to inquire of your own hearts, whether you have been led by the Spirit of God to receive this most important and deeply influential truth. How can I be accounted righteous before God? is the first great question of the awakened sinner's heart. Has it ever been—is it at this moment,—the inquiry of yours? If it be, the words of the text are the answer which God himself has given to it—Abram "believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness." Do you, according to the increased light and means of obtaining it in the dispensation under which you live, "believe in the Lord," believe that his sinless sacrifice alone can atone for your sins, his righteousness satisfy God for your unrighteousness, his Spirit sanctify you from all uncleanness and infirmity, and

lead you to glorify God in your day and generation? So believing with a true, a living, an obeying faith, the object of your belief, the Lord Jesus Christ, will be made unto you "wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption;" so believing you also will be justified before God; and "whom He justifies, them He also glorifies." Therefore, as the apostle says, "there is now no condemnation"—there will be none hereafter—to you "who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

LECTURE VII.

GENESIS XV. 17.

"AND IT CAME TO PASS, THAT, WHEN THE SUN WENT DOWN, AND IT WAS DARK, BEHOLD A SMOKING FURNACE, AND A BURNING LAMP THAT PASSED BETWEEN THOSE PIECES."

WE considered, in the last discourse, the testimony borne by the Spirit of God to the faith of Abram, with respect to the promised seed and to the Messiah who should spring from his loins. "He believed God, and He counted it to him for righteousness."

There was yet, however, another subject upon which the faith of the patriarch was to be exercised, which had been already revealed to him by the Almighty, and which was now briefly but strikingly

reiterated. This was the promise of the territory which his future progeny should inherit. The Lord said unto Abram, "I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it."

It is worthy of observation, with what a beautiful propriety to the peculiar subject of the revelation, the Almighty always adapts the name under which he reveals himself. Thus, when about to deliver to the Israelites a law which was to bind them to Him as a people for ever, the Almighty marked his peculiar claims upon their gratitude and their obedience, by saying, "I am the Lord, the God which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage;" leaving it to their own hearts to supply the addition, "Can we therefore refuse to obey Him who has broken every chain which held us in captivity, that He might bind us to himself in the bonds of love?" It was thus also that the Lord ushered in

to Abram the improbable promise of the whole territory upon which he stood, by revealing himself to him as the God who had done greater things for him than this already, when He brought him out of the idolatrous land of his nativity.

And is it not in a similar manner, my brethren, and with the same beautiful propriety, that the Almighty continues to reveal himself to the heart of every one of his believing and obeying people? Does He not say to each of you, I am the Lord who redeemed thee, I am He who called thee when in ignorance and sin; "when I passed by thee," I quote the words of God by his prophet Ezekiel, "and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee, Live;" and wilt thou cease to follow me, or can I ever cease to love, to guard, and to provide for thee? Surely there can be no promise of future protection so encouraging as the recollection of past mercies. What could establish Abram more fully in the hope

that the land of Canaan should one day be his own, than the remembrance that He who promised it had already demonstrated his love, by calling him from the land of the Chaldees; and his power, by bringing him thus far in security and peace? What can establish you, my brethren, so fully in the hope of an inheritance in the heavenly Canaan, as the grateful recollection of all that your heavenly Father has done for you in the land of your nativity? When you remember for how many years you, most probably, lived in utter forgetfulness or ignorance of God, and yet during the whole of that period, were nurtured by his parental care; when you consider for how long a time you continued, perhaps in open defiance, or in secret neglect of God, and yet even then were sought and found by the influence of his good Spirit, and brought to some little degree of knowledge and love of himself; when again you reflect how God has watched

over you since you have received the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, how he has preserved you from dangers, secured you in seasons of temptation, supported you in times of trial, cherished you in the days of sickness, comforted you in the hours of despondency; you cannot imagine that he will now desert you—you cannot believe that he will so mar the work of his own hands, the labour of his own love, as to cast you off for ever, and, after bearing with you through all the toils of the journey, forsake you when drawing to your journey's end. O no, my beloved brethren! Learn to have more confidence in your God, more reliance upon Him who has said, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee;" more dependance upon Him who, while you were yet enemies, poured forth his blood upon the cross to reconcile you to God. There cannot have been such an expenditure of love for so small, so pitiful

a return: nothing short of the eternal safety of your undying spirit can be a sufficient compensation for love so bountiful, so infinite.

No sooner had the Almighty repeated to Abram the promise which we have been considering, than we are told that the father of the faithful replied, "Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?"

There is no reason to conclude from this, that Abram doubted that he should inherit the promised land; we are indeed assured that he fully believed in the Lord. But who is there among the sons of men whose faith is so perfect as to require no confirmation? Among the many real children of God who can say, I hope that I have an interest in the great atonement, I believe and trust that the Lord Jesus Christ is my Redeemer; how few are there, comparatively, who are enabled to declare, in the full assurance of faith with the appropriation of holy Job of old, "I know that my Redeemer liveth."

Who is there, therefore, who may not with propriety adopt the prayer of the believing father in the Gospel, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief?"

It was doubtless upon this principle that we find the Almighty listening without displeasure to the requests both of Gideon and of Hezekiah, when they, although believing, required a sign in corroboration of their belief: and even blaming the unbelieving Ahaz for stubbornly refusing to ask a sign, when it was freely offered him by God himself.

In the present instance, therefore, the Almighty immediately acceded to the implied request of the patriarch, and commanded him, saying, "Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she-goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtle-dove and a young pigeon. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not."

Thus was everything placed in order

for the sign which Abram had asked, and which the Almighty had readily promised. Still was Abram required to "tarry the Lord's leisure." From the early dawn to the closing eve, did he sit beside the sacrifice, but there was no voice nor any that answered; and yet he neither slumbered nor slept; neither suffered himself to repine, nor became careless and indifferent: so far from it, that we are told, "when the fowls came down upon the carcases, Abram drove them away;" he would not suffer that which he was offering to the Lord, to be either diminished or defiled. Would, my brethren, that in all our religious duties, there were the same patient spirit of watchfulness, and the same untiring assiduity, the same unflagging zeal; that while engaged in the service of our God we were equally anxious to banish every wandering thought, to drive far away from us every worldly imagination — those un-

clean birds which come down upon our offerings, and sully, and taint, and disfigure every sacrifice which we would bring to the altar of the Lord.

At length the time arrived when Abram's faithfulness and watchfulness having been sufficiently tried, the Lord redeemed his promise.

"When the sun was going down," says the inspired historian, "a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and lo, a horror of great darkness fell upon him." It was while in this supernatural ecstasy, that the Almighty delivered to him the following prophecy of the fate which awaited his descendants. "Know of a surety, that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years." The middle clause of this sentence, "and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them," is to be considered parenthetical; for the actual servitude of the Israelites was only for a period of about

eighty-six years, and we should therefore read it, "Know of a surety, that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, four hundred years." "And also," continues the prophecy, "that nation whom they serve, will I judge; and afterwards shall they come out with great substance." Here was a distinct and circumstantial prediction of the long sojourn of the seed of Abram in a strange country; of the bondage to which they should in after-times be subjected in the land of Egypt; of the plagues with which the Almighty, when bringing forth his people with a high hand, and a stretched-out arm, should judge the Egyptians; and of "the jewels of silver, and jewels of gold," which should be presented to the Israelites by their terrified task-masters, by which they should spoil the Egyptians, and come forth from the house of their captivity "with great substance."

The only point of any difficulty in the

prediction, is the period of four hundred years, since we are told in the 12th chapter of Exodus, that "the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years." To reconcile these apparently contradictory dates, it is only necessary to observe, that in the vision of which we are speaking, when the Almighty says, "Thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs four hundred years," the sojourning of the seed of Abram in a foreign land is dated from the time of the birth of Isaac, from which event, to the deliverance from Egypt, was exactly four hundred and five, or in round numbers, four hundred years. While in Exodus, the sojourning of the Israelites is dated from the arrival of Abram himself in Canaan, which was twenty-five years earlier, and thus, both these conflicting dates are perfectly reconcilable to the same event.

It is interesting to observe how completely we are enabled, by the light of

inspiration, to trace the employments of Abram throughout the whole of the important day, of the events of which we are speaking. It was in the early dawn of this day, that God led the patriarch to the door of the tent, before sun-rise, and pointed out to him the innumerable stars shining in the firmament. It was in the succeeding part of the day, that the animals were killed and prepared, as God had commanded; it was when the sun was going down that a deep sleep fell upon Abram, in which he heard the prediction of which we have been speaking; and again, it was when the sun went down, and it was dark, that the sign he had requested was vouchsafed.

What a day was this! How do the constant intercourse and daily walking of the patriarchs with God, put to shame all our feeble and momentary communings with him! We can hardly believe that ours is the same God, and that we are bound to him by ties as close, and

by a relationship as endearing, as these holy men of old. Well may the hourly aspirations of our souls for ever be, "O for a closer walk with God!"

But we must hasten on to the consideration of the sign which the Almighty had promised Abram, and which was no longer withheld. The following is the remarkable description given by the pen of inspiration: "And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp passed between those pieces" of the creatures which Abram, at God's command, had killed and divided. You who are acquainted with the customs of the nations of antiquity, will see in this something more than a mere unmeaning sign; you will recollect that the usual ceremonial in important national covenants, of which we have some very remarkable instances in ancient lore, was to divide an animal into two or more parts; the persons

covenanting passed between these parts; intimating that should they break the covenant, they should deserve to be cut asunder, and divided limb from limb, as the animal was between whose mangled remains they were passing.

The smoking furnace which passed between the pieces, is usually considered as an emblem of the dark furnace of trouble, affliction, and bondage, which the Israelites endured in Egypt, to which reference is so peculiarly made in the fourth chapter of Deuteronomy, where it is said, "The Lord hath brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even Egypt;" while the burning lamp which followed the smoking furnace, symbolized the schechinah, or glorious majesty of God, which should be with the Israelites in their great deliverance from the house of bondage, when in the words of the prophet, their salvation went forth "as a lamp that burneth." The Almighty thus, under the symbol of the smoking "furnace" and "burning lamp," passing

between the pieces, not only gave to Abram the requested sign, but, as we are told in the following verses, corroborated his promise, by thus making a covenant with Abram, that He, the Almighty, would not desert the progeny of Abram in their day of trial, but that He would accompany them in all their wanderings, and finally establish them in the promised land.

The land of Canaan therefore was given and solemnly made over: but the actual possession of it was withheld for four generations. The reason afforded by God for this postponement of the promised inheritance, is a very remarkable one. "In the fourth generation, they shall come hither again, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." Although, therefore, the land of Canaan was, as we have seen, made over by solemn covenant to the seed of Abram, the justice of God would not consent to their taking possession, until the guilt of the present inhabitants should cry aloud

for that punishment with which they were afterwards so fearfully visited. When this period should arrive, the Israelites were to enter in and take possession, "utterly to destroy all that they had, and to spare them not, but to slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass."

Surely the effects of a sentence so fearfully severe, and yet so unquestionably just, could never have been intended to pass away with the guilty generation which it swept into perdition. Does it not cry with a warning voice at the present day, and at the present hour, to every nation under heaven? Does it not speak with a peculiar emphasis to ourselves, my brethren, as the inhabitants of a country which has most guiltily sinned, and yet for a long series of years most abundantly prospered? The iniquity of the Amorites was long, very long, nearly four hundred years, in filling up, for that period elapsed before the Israel-

ites came into possession; but fill it eventually did, and the moment it had so filled, the justice of God was manifested in their total extirpation. Turn not a deafened ear, or a hardened heart, I beseech you, to so solemn a warning. Are there no events passing around you to lead you to fear that the iniquity of our own nation may also be filling up? that our day of trial may be approaching? that the mercies so abundantly received, so little acknowledged, so long abused, may, as in the case of the Amorites, be cancelling our title-deeds, and preparing the way for the new possessors? and that yet a little while, and a perfectly just and a holy God will be compelled to say, "The iniquity of the people of England is now full?"

It is for you, my brethren, and for myself, under the divine grace and guidance, yet to endeavour to postpone that sentence; the sins of every nation must be made up of the sins of the indi-

vidual members of that nation; every humble, holy, prayerful follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, and servant of our God, however low his rank, however small his means, however weak his attainments, is keeping back the day of solemn and certain visitation. I do not scruple to assert, because from my heart I believe it to be true, since all revelation teaches, and all history confirms it, that the essentially Christian part of the community, the men and the women, and the children who fear to offend God, and who love his commandments, who are found in his temples and at his altar in public, and upon their knees in private, are the salt which has kept, and is at this moment keeping—God only knows how long they will be permitted to keep us—from those trials which may be approaching. It is not the wisdom of our statesmen, it is not the courage of our soldiers, it is not whether one party or another hold the helm of government,

which can preserve us from the day of visitation: it is instrumentally to be done by the prayers, and the lives, and the devoted and consistent piety of the people of God.

You then, who love your country, and who love your own little ones, who are entering upon life at a most awful period, think how powerful an additional motive you have here for an increase of faith, and holiness, and self-denial, and obedience. Our iniquity is not yet full, but remember that when the waters are at the brim, one drop will make them overflow. The eye of the Lord is even now upon this guilty country and upon its guilty inhabitants: the sword of the Lord is even now uplifted to strike; "offences must needs come, but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh:" woe to those who assist in filling up the rapidly rising measure. Be not content, in times like these, even with mere personal holiness; use your efforts with all

over whom you possess the slightest control; urge them to a greater devotedness to God, and to a quiet, peaceable demeanour, to habits of order, and obedience to "the powers that be." At such a time every one will be a faithful servant to his earthly king who is a true believer in the King of kings. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem;" be much in prayer, both in your families and in secret, that a God of wisdom may direct the councils of our rulers in the administration of the affairs of our country, at this peculiarly trying and difficult crisis. The evil day may still be averted; the gathering tempest, which even now darkens and lowers in the distance, may yet be dispersed; devotedness of heart, and soul, and life to God, will yet be accepted, prayer will yet be heard; the hand of the Lord, the providence of the Lord, and the day of the Lord, may yet be more publicly acknowledged by us than they have been, and the glory of the Lord, instead of our own glory,

may be made the more frequent subject of our boast.

But time is hastening on, the judgments of God are abroad, our condemnation slumbereth not; the smoking furnace, the symbol of national trial and national suffering, as in the vision of Abram, may be already kindled in our land: if it be, my Christian brethren, if no prayers, no efforts shall avail to postpone its approach, let us then only supplicate our God that the burning lamp may, as of old, accompany it; that the divine presence may not forsake his children; that "one like unto the Son of God" may be with us in the furnace, tempering its heat, shortening its duration, sanctifying its fires; that thus as a nation and as individuals, we may come out of the furnace chastened, purified, but not consumed; our dross purged away, and every Christian grace and every holy affection shining more and more brightly to the glory of God our Saviour.

LECTURE VIII.

GENESIS xviii. 1.

"AND THE LORD APPEARED UNTO HIM IN THE PLAINS OF MAMRE."

AFTER the remarkable vision which formed the subject of the last discourse, we are informed by the inspired historian, that Sarai, Abram's wife, growing impatient for the long-postponed, though promised seed, prevailed upon Abram to unite himself, in a secondary marriage, to Hagar, Sarai's handmaid. This was doubtless the effect of sinful impatience on the part of Sarai, and was agreed to with what cannot be considered as an innocent acquiescence upon the part of Abram. Like most other sinful compli-

ances, this act of the patriarch was succeeded by vexation and punishment. Insolence and contempt soon took possession of the handmaid; jealousy and discontent assailed her mistress; while, for nearly fourteen years, all personal manifestations of the Almighty to his faithful, but in this instance erring, servant were suspended. We do not mean to assert that the long intermission of the delightful manifestations with which Abram was favoured by the great Jehovah, was intended as the punishment of this offence; but it appears neither unscriptural nor unreasonable to conclude that it was so, when we remember how often, in all ages, similar conduct has been followed by similar results, and men's sins have separated between them and their God, and hid as it were his face from them."

My brethren, do you ever complain that in your own case, communion with the Most High is more than usually diffi-

cult; that it is not with you as in times past; that your intercourse with Heaven is impeded: that (as the apostle expresses it) your prayers are "hindered;" that your very praises appear to have lost their wings, and to be unable to rise through the clouded atmosphere which surrounds you? This is a state of mind not absolutely unknown, we believe, to any among the children of God; when meditation becomes irksome, prayer wearisome, and all intercourse with heaven cold, dead, and unprofitable; it is, we believe, consonant with the painful experience of most Christians, when we say that such feelings are neither unknown nor unfrequent; when the spiritual life is so deadened within us, that the slightest heavenward motion is an effort, and real inward communion so little felt and enjoyed, that we are almost tempted by our spiritual enemy to forego the mockery of the external form. This is usually termed the hidings of God's face, and

too often and too hastily attributed to the mere sovereignty of God, while a little careful self-examination would frequently enable us to discover that the cause is not in God, but in ourselves; that if the gracious visitings of the Spirit of God to the soul of the believer have been intermitted; if the promise of our divine Master, "We will come unto him and make our abode with him," appear to remain unfulfilled, some secret sin, some unrestrained temper, some unholy compliance, some unchecked and unchastened desire, like the Achan in the camp of Israel, is suffered to be undetected in the heart, and to rob us of the promised blessing.

While it is thus in judgment, it is also in mercy, in great and distinguishing mercy, that under circumstances such as these the Lord withdraws himself from us for a season. If we suffered the due reward of our deeds, he would withdraw himself from us, not for a season, but

for ever. How infinitely then does our gracious Redeemer magnify his love to you, if you are a child of God, when in the very act of chastening! He well knows, that although, while He was with you, you far too little estimated his presence, yet if you have once truly experienced his love, you will never be happy, never be at peace, under a conviction of his absence. It is therefore by this temporary withdrawal that He teaches you to "examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith," to "judge yourselves that ye be not judged of the Lord," and, above all, to look and long and pray for his return. It is thus that He produces those exercises of faith and love so often referred to by the Church of old, when she says, "By night on my bed I sought Him whom my soul loveth; I sought Him, but I found him not;"—those mourning exercises, the most painful, but perhaps amongst the most profitable of the Christian life, which, while sorrow and woe

occupy the heart and compel you to "sow in tears," enable you, in the issue, by the return of the light of God's countenance, to "reap in joy."

After fourteen years had elapsed, during which, as we have observed, Abram had been debarred from all extraordinary communings with the Most High, we find the Almighty again appearing to him, urging him to a more perfect walk with God: "I am the Almighty God; walk before me and be thou perfect;" repeating the assurances of the unalterable nature of the covenant which he had made with him, and instituting the rite of circumcision, that "sign," or "seal," as the apostle to the Romans expresses it, "of the faith which he had, yet being uncircumcised," and by which alone he had long before been justified, "not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision."

It was at this period of the patriarch's history that the Almighty made that remarkable change in the name both of

Abram and his wife, which should convey to their remote posterity the remembrance of the honour which they had received from the Lord. "Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, (a high father,) but thy name shall be called Abraham, (the father of a numerous progeny;) for a father of many nations have I made thee." "And as for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, (my princess,) but Sarah (a princess) shall her name be." "She shall be a mother of nations, kings of people shall be of her." This was the manner in which the Almighty, from of old, distinguished those whom the Lord delighted to honour. This is the manner in which the kings of the earth have in all ages, by titles of distinction and names of renown, adorned their favourites and elevated them above their fellows. And this is still the manner,—but O! how infinitely superior in its results, how far more blessed in its imperishable conse-

quences!—that our King, the King of kings and Lord of lords, has promised to designate his covenanting people; by giving them, as St. John declares, "a new name which no man knoweth, saving he that receiveth it." Do you inquire what that new name may be?—it is the new name of adoption, even "the child of God." This is the name which in the ear and heart of the believer supersedes every other name; which marks at once his separation from the family of the first Adam, in which he was born by nature, and his complete and joyful reception into the family of the second Adam, into which he has been brought by grace. This is indeed a title worthy of all your efforts, all your prayers; a title conferred upon the meanest and lowest believers, freely offered to the poorest of you whom I now address, and yet without which the wealthiest and most distinguished among you can never enter into the kingdom of God.

Examine then earnestly and prayerfully, my brethren, each for yourself, whether this change of name, the necessary and inseparable accompaniment of a change of heart, has passed upon you; whether you are one of the sheep belonging to the fold of the good Shepherd, of whom it is said, "He knoweth his sheep by name;" whether, in the language of the Psalmist, "when God writeth up his people," He can say of you, "This man was born in Zion." "None knoweth it saving he that receiveth it," saith our Lord; none can know it, none can feel and enjoy it, but you who have been made the blessed subjects of that renovating change to which it applies; to all others it is incomprehensible, unintelligible,—in the language of the world, mysticism, and enthusiasm. To you it is the never-ceasing testimony to the power of God and the love of God in Christ Jesus, "the promise of the life which now is,

and of that which is to come," written as with a sunbeam upon your hearts; for if a child of God, then an heir, an heir of God, and joint-heir with Christ, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. O slight not this glorious distinction! do not value lightly a name and a privilege which the eternal Son of God left the bosom of his Father to purchase for you, which the eternal Spirit of God esteems it his highest prerogative to ratify and to apply; without which the eternal Jehovah can never be to you a Father, or you become his "sons and daughters, saith the Lord God Almighty."

No sooner had Abraham heard the word of the Lord, "Sarah shall be a mother of nations, kings of people shall be of her," than we are told, "that he fell upon his face and laughed." We are not for a moment to imagine that Abraham's laughter was the effect of doubt or mistrust, for we are expressly told, in the epistle to the

Romans, that "he staggered not at the promise through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully persuaded that what he had promised He was able also to perform." When therefore he fell upon his face and laughed, he prostrated himself, a token of reverence for the divine Being who spake to him; and he laughed, or exulted greatly, an evidence of his certainty of the promise which was made him. How remarkable a demonstration of that faith which is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen!" How strong an expression of that which was still future, still to the eye of sense uncertain and improbable! And yet, my brethren, is it not thus that the true and established believer learns, even upon earth, not only to believe and trust, but to exult in the prospect of heaven, and to rest upon the promises of God with a certainty of hope and a fulness of joy, which to the doubting

Christian are utterly unknown? Strive earnestly to realize something of this delightful yet humble confidence in your own experience; endeavour to rest with the simplicity of an assured and scriptural faith upon all the declarations of God, and you will not only be enabled to rejoice in the certainty of the glory which shall be revealed in you, but in the certainty of every present help, of grace and strength and guidance on the way which leads to it; "for," says the apostle, "all the promises of God in Christ Jesus, (of the means as well as the end,) are yea and (in Him) amen unto the glory of God by us."

Three[1] months only had elapsed after the rite of circumcision had been instituted, and the change of Abraham's name had taken place, when a manifestation of the Almighty, perhaps the most remarkable recorded in the Old Testament, was vouchsafed. It is thus narrated in the

[1] Dr. Lightfoot.

simple and beautiful language of the inspired historian: "The Lord appeared unto Abraham in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; and he lift up his eyes and looked, and lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself towards the ground, and said, My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant; let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree; and I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts: after that ye shall pass on; for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do as thou hast said." The three personages here spoken of have been considered by many to have been only three created angels, sent from the presence of the Lord; but this can scarcely be the case, when we find their appearance spoken of in the text as an

appearance of "the Lord," and again, one of them expressly called "the Lord" in the thirteenth verse, and speaking, in the following verses, in language which no created being would surely venture to assume. Some commentators think, that as the narrative commences by saying, "The Lord appeared unto Abraham," and as Abraham addresses the three together under the appellation of "my Lord," it was probably a manifestation of the three persons of the holy Trinity. This opinion, however, appears very contrary to the general tenour of Scripture, in which we find no instance upon record of the Father or the Holy Ghost ever assuming the human form; while, again, in the latter part of the story, when the two angels had left the third with Abraham, and had gone on to Sodom, they say, "The Lord hath sent us to destroy this city." I allude to this because some authority has been improperly attached to this misapprehension, from the cir-

cumstances of our Church selecting this portion of holy writ as one of the lessons for Trinity Sunday. We should imagine that her intention was not to adduce this as a proof of the trinity of the persons, but of the plurality of the persons in the Godhead: one of the persons of the blessed Trinity being here evidently present upon the earth, while the eternal Father, "whom none hath seen nor can see, was dwelling in the light which no man may approach unto."

It was during the plain repast of the angels, beneath the wide-spreading branches of the over-shadowing tree, while Abraham, with the simple manners of that early age, stood by them, himself at once their servant and their host, that the first of these remarkable personages thus addressed him: "Where is Sarah, thy wife? and he said, Behold in the tent. And he said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard him in the tent-

door, which was behind him, and laughed within herself." This action of Sarah was precisely similar in its external appearance, to that of Abraham, of which we have already spoken, and yet how widely different in its motives and intention. While he laughed from the exulting feeling of an unhesitating faith, she, on the contrary, laughed in all the incredulity of a doubting mind. "They did not more agree in their desire," says Bishop Hall, "than differ in their affection: Abraham laughed for joy, Sarah for distrust: Abraham laughed because he believed it would be so, Sarah because she believed it could not be so." And the Lord said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? Is any thing too hard for the Lord? Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not, for she was afraid." Thus adding to the sin by the cowardly concealment and the guilty falsehood, and receiving the merited reproof of the Most High, "Nay, but thou didst laugh,"

at the very moment when, if her faith had been stronger, she might have been enjoying, with unmingled feelings of happiness, her greatest earthly blessing.

Beware, my brethren, from her example, I most solemnly charge you, beware of every thought, every publication, every person that would teach you to receive even the minutest portion of the revelation of God with the feeling of incredulity, or the smile of ridicule. The protection of the most crowded assembly, the secrecy of the most private retirement, will alike be unavailing to shield you from the eye of Him from whom no secrets are hid. Sarah laughed behind the door of the tent, where no human eye could witness it, and yet the Lord saw it: be careful that he never sees on your countenance the smile of distrust, the sneer of derision at his promises, his precepts, his people. How common a sin is this at the present day, how injurious to the cause of God, how little is it thought of now by those who are guilty

of it, how unceasingly will it be remembered by them in eternity! The profane joke, the contemptuous appellation, the sneer of imaginary superiority, the open ridicule, the mockery of the saints of the Most High, how will the eternal echo of that laughter chill the heart and appal the soul on that great and coming day when every excuse will be unavailing, every denial vain; "NAY, BUT THOU DIDST LAUGH," will carry a pang to the scorner's soul, which eternity itself will not enable him to forget. "NAY, BUT THOU DIDST LAUGH," will continue to sound in his ears, and to oppress his spirit, when he and laughter shall have long been strangers, and when tears, and sighing, and mourning, and woe, have been his unchanged, and shall be his unchangeable portion; for of all laughter such as this, the word of God has pronounced the termination and the fate, "The end of that mirth is heaviness;" "Woe unto you that laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep."

LECTURE IX.

GENESIS xviii. 19.

"FOR I KNOW HIM, THAT HE WILL COMMAND HIS CHILDREN AND HIS HOUSEHOLD AFTER HIM, AND THEY SHALL KEEP THE WAY OF THE LORD."

THE inspired historian having recorded the instance of Sarah's incredulity, with which the last lecture concluded, thus continues the narrative: "And the men rose up from thence, and looked towards Sodom; and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way. And the Lord said," even the angel Jehovah, who was one of the three, "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For

I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him."

How remarkable is the reason here alleged by the Almighty for communicating his intentions to the faithful patriarch! "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord." Abraham's family religion, therefore, his determination to honour God himself, and to see that his children and servants also honoured the Lord, is given as the reason for his being made acquainted with the intentions of the Most High.

My brethren, let me urge you seriously to inquire, whether you have ever sufficiently considered the obligations of this great duty for which the patriarch was so highly honoured? Are you equally

zealous for the Lord God of Hosts in your families and in your households? In what manner are you educating, or permitting others to educate, your children? Are you satisfied if their advancement in that species of learning which the world has agreed to denominate good education, be proportionable to your expectations, although the one great business of life, the very purpose for which they have been sent into existence, has been neglected? Are you contented if your boys have learnt a certain number of languages, and your girls a certain number of accomplishments, although they may scarcely know whether they possess an immortal soul, or in what manner that soul is to be prepared for the never-ending futurity? Do you sufficiently bear in mind, that your children are lent to you by God, to be trained by you for God: I say, lent to you, for who shall tell how speedily these precious loans shall be resumed, how quickly they

shall be summoned into a world, where all the accomplishments for which you now are willing to sacrifice every other acquisition, will be utterly useless; a world whose unnumbered myriads speak but one language, and sing but one song, which is for ever new, and will be for ever delightful, when all that is now thought worthy of acquirement shall have passed away and been forgotten? How often, even in Christian parents, do we find the most lamentable inconsistency in these things, the most fearful forgetfulness of these great truths; how often do we see Christian parents priding themselves the most upon those very qualifications in their children, which will one day only lead them the deeper into all the temptations and follies of an ungodly world; looking with gratification chiefly upon their progress in those fashionable accomplishments, which will merely render them the readier victims to the three great enemies of our souls, "the

lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life." How few are there who possess sufficient faith, and sufficient courage and resolution, really to educate their children for God! To resolve and to act upon that resolution, that every species of knowledge, every acquirement should, we will not say be disregarded, for we are no advocates for that contracted state of mind, and habit of thought, which a contracted education is too apt to induce; but while every species of knowledge, and every useful acquirement should be cultivated, and highly cultivated, still to resolve that all should be kept in complete and entire subserviency to the knowledge of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, and to the acquirement of Christian motives, and Christian principles. To this great work, to this blessed end, all your prayers, your efforts, your advice, your example should be perpetually tending. From their earliest infancy,—and you may begin much ear-

lier than persons in general imagine, for a child even of three years old is not too young to commence with, not too young to worship God, and to lisp the name of that Saviour, who thought none too young to come to his arms, and to receive his blessing,—from their very earliest infancy, therefore, your children should be taught to know that this is the one leading object of all your instructions to them, of all your desires for them. While we urge this upon you, we would however acknowledge our convictions that it is not so much in early infancy that these things are neglected. We believe that few mothers, that no Christian mothers, are in the habit of neglecting to instruct their children, so far as their own light and knowledge in spiritual things enabled them.

The mischief usually commences when the child is partially separated from the parents. As a very eminent writer of the present day has observed, "It is one

of the evils of our schools, public and private, that the habits of devotion which a child learns at its mother's knees are broken, and the seeds of early piety destroyed."[1] It is certainly too often at our schools, more especially our public schools,[2] that evil company and evil counsels combined with an education which is far better qualified to form an accomplished heathen, than a spiritually-minded Christian, obliterate and uproot all that remains of maternal teaching, and infantile instruction. While at those intervals, when, as at the approaching season, the children return to the parent's roof, the mother's authority is at an end, and instead of every effort being

[1] Southey's Colloquies, vol. ii. p. 94.

[2] "Public Schools."—The Author is glad to avail himself of this opportunity to acknowledge, that there is reason to believe that much improvement is taking place with regard to religious instruction, at least in one of the most celebrated of these establishments—an example which he sincerely prays may be speedily followed by all others.

employed, every opportunity anxiously seized to "strengthen the things which remain, and are ready to die," pleasure and idleness, folly and dissipation, are too frequently all that await them; so that the poor child, throughout the years of education, is living in a perpetual interchange of the heathen lessons of classical lore, and, in too many instances, the heathen practices of fashionable society; and when at length ushered into the world, who shall affect astonishment, that a child so educated is only in name and profession a Christian?

My brethren, with every desire, and at every expense of time and thought, and precept and prayer, it is no easy matter to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Our own daily life and conversation must be in some degree conformed to the rule of God's word, before we can even hope to do so. Children soon learn to attend to what they see in preference

to what they hear; if these do not harmonize, example is followed, and precept is disregarded.

Consider then seriously, my brethren, if you love your children, if you value your own souls, how you are standing before God in this particular at the present moment. In your families, will it be impossible, on the great day of account, to plead a parent's example in justification of a child's delinquencies? Do your children never behold you, upon frivolous pretences, neglecting the services of this house, or the duties of this hallowed day of rest? Have they never learnt from your example the first principles of licentiousness, of covetousness, of intemperance, or of want of charity? Will it be impossible for any child of yours to say, on that great day when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, "The first oath, or the first falsehood I ever heard, I heard from the lips of a parent?" "The first time I ever used

profane language, or spoke slightingly of the things or the people of God, I was not reproved by my parents." "The first time I ever entered those scenes which afterwards became my ruin, I entered them with the knowledge, and the sanction, and even in the company of my parents!"

We do not say that such things are; we trust that in this congregation they are not; but if they are, at how immeasurable a distance must such parents be from the patriarch before us! The Almighty has recorded it, to Abraham's everlasting honour, that he would not only advise and counsel his children and household in the ways of God, and accompany these counsels by his own consistent and holy life, but that he would command as a master, where he failed to influence as a father. Parental authority, therefore, that by-gone word, must accompany parental prayers, and parental precepts, and be enforced, if you

would walk in the steps, and inherit the blessedness of Abraham. God saw that Eli reasoned and expostulated with his children, and that in a manner which many at the present day would consider as more than sufficiently serious, and sufficiently severe, but God cut him off and his family around him, "because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." God saw that the guilt and usurpation of Adonijah lay at the door of David, his too fond and partial parent; for the Spirit of God has recorded this as the remarkable reason of all his delinquencies, because "his father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so?" How widely different was the case of the holy man before us! The Almighty saw that Abraham would be guilty of no such weakness; that he would "command his family and his household after him." Nothing short of this, therefore, will be considered by God as fulfilling the duties

of Christian parents and Christian masters. We must "RESTRAIN" our children, we must "COMMAND" our household in the ways of holiness, and in the paths of righteousness; or if they perish, we shall not be guiltless of their blood, we shall not have delivered our souls.

Continuing the history before us, we are informed that the Lord, addressing himself, as it appears, to Abraham, said, "Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know." We find the Almighty here condescending as He has often done, to speak after the fashion of men, to render the perfect equity and undoubted righteousness of his judicial proceedings as obvious to the eye of reason as they have ever been, and must ever be, to the eye of faith. "I will go down and see"—I will tho-

roughly investigate and accurately know before I punish. Perhaps also to give Abraham more boldness in interceding for the guilty, when he saw that the sentence had not gone forth fully ratified and confirmed.

Then commences the most remarkable instance of human intercession to be met with in the revealed word of God, in which the faithfulness of Abraham and his near access to a throne of grace, the astonishing loving-kindness and forbearance of the great Jehovah, are painted in colours which the pencil of uninspired mortality dare not imitate. "And Abraham drew near and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city, wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? that be far from thee: shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? And the Lord said,

If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes. And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes: peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous, wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five? And He said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it." Thus did Abraham, still presuming to plead with holy boldness, continue to intercede, and thus did the Almighty continue to bestow, until the number of the righteous was reduced to ten, and the Lord mercifully declared, "If ten be found there, I will not destroy it for ten's sake."

Having reduced the number of the righteous to this little company, Abraham ceased; so that it has been truly said that "Abraham was tired of asking before God was tired of granting." Who can affirm, that if Abraham had per-

severed in thus earnestly and faithfully wrestling with God, until he had reduced the number even to a solitary individual, even to "just Lot," the one righteous man within the accursed Sodom, who will assert that he might not still have "had power with God and have prevailed?" We are not straitened in God; when we cease to ask, it is because we are straitened in ourselves. "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it," is the declaration of God himself. Who shall presume to place a limit to faithful, persevering prayer, other than that which our Lord himself has recorded, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son."

How important then is the privilege, how urgent the duty of intercessory prayer for our country, our family, our friends! Shall Abraham be thus fervent, thus anxious in behalf of a guilty city, by whose destruction he could by no

possibility have been injured; and will you be silent, or cold, or indifferent, in behalf of your native land, which contains everything you love and value here below? If you have never yet interceded with God for the mass of ignorance, and impiety, and sin by which we are surrounded, let me urge you to commence in earnest this day; pray for the general outpouring of the Spirit of God upon the thousands and tens of thousands who disgrace the Christian name, and dishonour this Christian country. Pray especially that those misguided men, who by their infidel harangues, and widely disseminated atheistical publications, are, we fear, at the present time, injuring the principles, and jeoparding the souls of thousands, may be brought to the knowledge of the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom He has sent, before they have called down the vengeance of the Almighty upon themselves and their misguided

followers, and the country whose evil lot it is to be the theatre of their guilty exertions.

While remembering that it is your duty thus to intercede for all who require your prayers, be still more earnest for those who have the closest claims upon you. Remember at all times, more particularly when drawing near in faith and love to the table of your Lord, those who are endeared to you by the ties of affinity and friendship. Intercede especially for your parents, the wife of your bosom, the children of your love. If any of these be still unhappily at a distance from God, be earnest, be unceasing, in your petitions that they may be "brought nigh by the blood of the cross." Abraham's zeal, Abraham's prayer, although for a noble purpose, were for a purpose infinitely inferior to yours; his were to save the bodies of sinners from a fiery sepulture, yours to pluck their immortal souls "as brands

from the burning." Will you be remiss, can you be indifferent in interceding for such an object as this? Can you bear even for a moment to dwell upon the thought, that they whom you have loved and caressed on earth, shall, as Chillingworth expresses it, instead of shining gloriously as the stars in the firmament of God's love, glare hideously as the flames in the dungeons of his wrath? God forbid that you should cease to pray for them! The day will come which will bring its reward with it, when every faithful prayer shall be answered, either by the salvation of those for whom you have pleaded, or by the increase of peace and joy which it shall bring when it returns into your own bosom.

While, therefore, you remember with Abraham, that you are but "dust and ashes," that in your own name, and in your own merits you cannot venture to address yourself to God, remember for your consolation and encouragement,

that you have a High Priest within the veil, who will present your poor petitions at the throne of his Father; who will do more than this—who will intercede for you, and for the object of your prayers, in a manner that Abraham never interceded; for the intercession of Jesus cannot be weary, his petitions cannot fail. Whether, therefore, you pray for others, or for yourself, let the eye of faith be fixed on Him, even on that Saviour, who "ever liveth to make intercession for you;"—who stands before the heavenly altar, with the golden censer; and the smoke of whose incense, even his own merits, accompanies the prayers of the saints ascending up in perpetual intercession before God, out of the angel's hand. How comforting, how delighting a thought to the true believer! Abraham's intercession, with all his fervency, and after all his efforts, could only avail to save the devoted cities of the plain, if ten righteous men could have been found

in Sodom. Our glorious Intercessor has availed to save ten thousand times ten thousand of the guilty progeny of Adam, though not one righteous man has been found throughout all their generations. Well may we unite with grateful hearts in that angelic hymn on earth, which shall be the burden of our songs in heaven: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory and blessing," now, henceforth, and for ever.

LECTURE X.

GENESIS xxi. 10.

"SHE SAID UNTO ABRAHAM, CAST OUT THIS BOND-WOMAN AND HER SON; FOR THE SON OF THIS BOND-WOMAN SHALL NOT BE HEIR WITH MY SON, EVEN WITH ISAAC."

"THE gifts and callings of God are without repentance," says the inspired word of the Most High. If it were otherwise, assuredly Abraham would never, after all his trials and all his difficulties, have been the progenitor of the promised seed. He had before sinned by equivocating with Pharaoh; he now sinned by equivocating with Abimelech; declaring again that Sarah was his sister, leaving it to be inferred that she was not his wife: and thus, from a base and cowardly distrust

of the divine guardianship and the divine protection, exposing her to the very danger from which, by a sinful evasion, he was endeavouring to shield her. Happy was it for Abraham, happy is it for ourselves, "that the Lord is our keeper!" There is not a blessing which we enjoy, either in possession or in prospect, from the most common endowment of divine Providence to the richest and most glorious, and most distinguished mercy of divine grace, which we could hope to retain now, or to inherit hereafter, if wholly dependent upon our own carefulness or watchfulness or caution. I say "if wholly dependent," because he who presumes to look to the Lord to keep him, without setting himself earnestly to strive, and watch, and pray, will as assuredly be disappointed, as the husbandman who should look to the Almighty in the day of harvest, after neglecting to work, and standing all the day idle in the season of seed-time.

Guarding the subject thus, as the word of God has thought it necessary and sufficient to guard it, I would repeat, thanks be to God, that his "gifts and callings are without repentance." Even the spiritual life of the soul, the richest gift in the treasury of heaven, would quickly perish from our grasp beneath the united efforts of the world, the flesh, and the devil, were it not for the faithfulness of Him "who has promised, who also will do it." Were it not that "our life is hid with Christ in God," so hidden that the craft of our spiritual enemies cannot search it out, that the darts of the wicked one cannot reach it, our enjoyment of this inestimable treasure would indeed be transitory and precarious. Adam himself, in the midst of all his innocency and all his happiness, could not retain the precious boon, though he had but one tempter and one temptation. You have ten thousand tempters, and ten thousand temptations, with a deceitful and desperately wicked heart within your bosom ready to listen to

and to love and to be beguiled by them all. How then could you hope to stand where he has fallen? You could not possess the remotest prospect of success, were it not from the unchangeableness of the Lord, who, if you are indeed among his followers, has made you what you are; and if you earnestly and faithfully seek Him, will keep you what you are, till time shall be no more, and sin, and temptation, and sorrow, shall have fled away for ever. Yes, my brethren, as it was with Abraham, so it is frequently with ourselves: while we by our carelessness, or guiltiness, or cowardice, are apparently frustrating the grace of God and rendering the promises of God of none effect, "the foundation of the Lord standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his;" and he is mercifully preparing a scourge for us, of our own procuring, to drive us back again into the fold from which we have so sinfully and guiltily wandered.

It was thus that when even Abraham,

"the friend of God," so far forgot his high calling as to prevaricate and falsify, the Almighty subjected him to be reproved by one far less distinguished than himself in the knowledge of the Most High, and to be publicly disgraced by Abimelech, before his assembled servants with a reproof which he was unable to answer: "Thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done." The Almighty, however, did not on this account deprive him of the promised blessing; Abraham was reproved, and Abraham repented, and received a pardon which he could not have deserved, for a sin which he could not have extenuated.

Such is the humbling history of the Christian's life; love, mercy, and pardon, on the part of God; sin, coldness, and forgetfulness, followed by a deep and heartfelt sorrow, contrition, and amendment, on the part of his people. O that while God, for his dear Son's sake, thus bears with us, my brethren; while all

his promises in Christ Jesus stand firmer than the foundations of the earth on which we live; we may be daily becoming more sensible of his love, more grateful for his forbearance, more consistently obedient to his will, more anxious for his salvation!

A twelvemonth had, in all probability, scarcely elapsed after the visit of the Lord to Abraham, which was recorded in our last discourse, before the long-expected blessing was vouchsafed. "For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him." Very profitable is it to observe how much the inspired writers love to trace every particular of every blessing to the hands of Him who sends it; in two short verses, "the Lord visited Sarah as he had said, the Lord did unto Sarah as he had spoken," "at the set time of which God had spoken." The gift itself, the time and manner of it, are all referred to the

merciful Jehovah. How it sweetens even the daily and common mercies of the Christian, to be thus habitually referred to God! From the births of your children, and the great and prominent mercies and advantages, and anniversaries of your lives, down to the humblest meal, the bread and water of the poorest among you, if you are living to God, you will deduce subjects of praise and thanksgiving, and grateful memorial. The Almighty has thought nothing which can affect the happiness and comfort of his children, too trifling to be inserted in the everlasting covenant, for "it has the promise of the life which now is, as well as that which is to come." Surely, therefore, you should think nothing too small, nothing too trifling, in which to recognise his hand, and for which to offer him your thanksgivings.

In due time, then, as we have seen, Isaac the promised son was born: "And the child grew and was weaned, and

Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned;" not on the day that he was circumcised. That was a religious ordinance, in which other duties, far more important than entertaining his family were to be observed. It remained for our days, and for the purer dispensation under which we live, to witness a time of religious duty, one of the highest services and holiest sacraments of our Church, even the baptisms of our children, converted into an occasion of banqueting and feasting. Such a season is most appropriate for collecting our families around us in social and innocent assembly, and those who take part in that holy ordinance, and will aid us with their prayers: but most inappropriate to be made a day of feasting, and revelry, and song. The admirable service of our Church for that holy sacrament teaches us to pray that "the child may lead the rest of his life according to this beginning;" a prayer which has often

come with melancholy forebodings to my heart, when I have seen the assemblage of fashionable friends and the preparation for the evening party to celebrate the christening of some loved child; a prayer sometimes, alas! we fear, too accurately and too painfully fulfilled; for how often has our Church been called to bear witness to the melancholy fact that a Christian course thus began in all the empty frivolity of worldliness and dissipation, has continued during "the rest of the life," a most true and faithful counterpart of the manner in which it has commenced, and has closed with a sad accomplishment of the parent's thoughtless petition, a youth of folly, an old age of sin, and an end "ACCORDING TO THIS BEGINNING."

It was on this day of feasting that another remarkable event in Abraham's domestic history took place. There was in Abraham's house, as we have had reason to observe in a former part of the history, not only Sarah and her child,

but Abraham's secondary wife, Hagar, and her son Ishmael, who if Isaac was three years old when he was weaned, which is the date affixed by the learned, was now in his seventeenth year. He had probably been led to expect, as the only child of his father Abraham, that he should inherit at least a very large portion of the abundance by which he was surrounded. The birth of Isaac, therefore, must have given a death-blow to these expectations: here was at once a legitimate heir to all the wealth of Abraham, a son not of the bond-woman but of the free-woman. Ishmael, therefore, could hope but for a scanty portion either of the consideration or the wealth to which the heir of so powerful a prince as Abraham might fairly be entitled.

The effect of this disappointment was not slow in manifesting itself. On the very day that Isaac was weaned, "Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had borne unto Abraham,

mocking," claiming the birthright and the inheritance, as appears from Sarah's speech to Abraham, and perhaps mocking at the promise of God with respect to Isaac, and despising him as the younger son.

Sarah, unable to bear a sight so deeply painful to the feelings of a parent, and acting, moreover, under the directions of the Most High, said unto Abraham, "Cast out this bond-woman and her son, for the son of this bond-woman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac. And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son." Notwithstanding, being assured by God that this was all in the due course of his providential arrangements, he hearkened unto the voice of Sarah, and sent forth into "the waste howling wilderness" the unhappy mother and her wayward son.

My younger brethren, let me urge you to mark well this incident in Ishmael's childhood. Ishmael was but a boy, yet

his actions were observed, and recorded, and punished by the great Jehovah. Do not therefore shelter yourselves under the too frequent excuse that "boys must be boys;" that there is one rule of conduct for the hey-day of youth, and another for the maturity of manhood. From the moment that you know the guilt of an untrue or an unchaste expression, the iniquity of an oath, the impiety of profaning the name, or of mocking at the things or the people of God, from that moment, be it at what age it may, you are as answerable before God, and you will be as accountable before the bar of his justice, as "the sinner of an hundred years old." Let me urge you, then, to greater carefulness against those temptations so peculiar to your age and sex; say not with him of old, "Our lips are our own, who is Lord over us?" but pray that God himself may "set a watch before your mouth and keep the door of your lips;" and as out of the abundance

of the heart the mouth speaketh, that He may renew and purify and cleanse your hearts by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit.

It is well worthy of observation, how completely the little incident before us exemplifies, so far as in this finite state of existence and imperfect state of moral and spiritual apprehension it is possible to exemplify, the mysterious dealings of God with man in regard to the undiscovered future. It might not unnaturally be said, that if the Almighty had selected the child of promise, even Isaac, for Abraham's heir, as it is revealed that He had, He could not do otherwise than reject Ishmael from the expected inheritance: that the one must be the following consequence of the other. This is the manner, passing from things temporal to things spiritual, in which men invariably reason upon the mysteries of God; drawing those deductions, which, to the finite sense and limited scan of

mortals, are apparently undeniable, and then presuming to question the justice or the mercy of the Omnipotent. Now let us examine the history before us, and see whether the facts will bear us out in the reasoning. Was Ishmael thus banished by any decree of God, irrespectively of his own conduct? Most assuredly not: Ishmael had remained in Abraham's house, and might have continued to remain there, for any influence that God's decree or promise, with regard to Isaac, would have possessed over his future fortunes. It was simply because Ishmael mocked at Isaac; because "he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit;" because he did not conduct himself as a true child of Abraham; that Ishmael was driven from the comforts and solaces of home, a wanderer and an outcast. Could Ishmael complain that any other reason whatever was the cause of his banishment? Could he urge any decree

of the Almighty as the motive for the exile from his father's house? It was impossible. When he looked back from the burning sands of the desert to the pleasant shade of his paternal tents, he could charge his present misery to no one but himself and to his own unworthy conduct. He would be compelled to say, "It is just, strictly, undeniably just, that I should forfeit that which I did not value, that I should no longer dwell with him whom I mocked and persecuted, that I should for ever lose an inheritance of which I had rendered myself so utterly unworthy."

Thus will it be at the last day, my brethren, with every impenitent sinner. No single being of all that sad and hopeless multitude who shall pass through the dreary gate into the regions of eternal sorrow—for "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, and many there be which go in thereat"—will be able to attribute his misery and his condemnation

to any other causes than his own iniquity and sin. While that "GOD IS LOVE" will echo throughout eternity in the many mansions of our Father's kingdom, that "GOD IS JUST" will echo throughout the same eternity in the dungeons of condemnation. Every soul who enters there will be compelled to admit, I am here from my own stubbornness, my own obduracy, my own sin. The promises of God were set before me as often as before others: the way of everlasting life was pointed out to me as often as to others; I was urged, entreated, reasoned with, solicited as affectionately and as frequently as others; often, how often would the Saviour of the world have gathered me, as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and I would not? I have "denied the Holy One and the Just;" I have "trodden under foot the Son of God, and have counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and have done despite to the Spirit of

grace," therefore am I here, and therefore must I remain here, consigned to the blackness of darkness for ever. How will every pang be strengthened, every arrow of God's wrath be sharpened, by convictions such as these! It would be some alleviation to the suffering spirit to be enabled to complain, I am here from the cruel decree of a cruel Maker, which I have striven, and prayed, and struggled to avoid: I was from all eternity condemned to this embittered lot, this imprisonment in everlasting burnings. But even this solace, if solace it might be, will be denied the sinner; his own soul, and his own judgment, and his own voice, must for ever echo back the eternal truth,—my sins, my obstinacy, my impenitence, and these alone, have placed me where I am!

My brethren, would you escape so fearful, so horrible a fate? Then for ever bear in mind that the Word of God has declared," "All are not Israel who are of

Israel, neither because they are of the seed of Abraham are they all children." Trust to no external relationship to God, but earnestly seek to ascertain whether you have been really made, by the power of divine grace, the children of the promise, even "the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus," and whether you can in all humility, yet with all holy confidence, truly say, "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." This is the real touchstone of a religious profession, this is the blessed appropriation of the promises, which ensures that you shall "neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ," nor ashamed nor uncertain in that day when He "shall make up his jewels." Rest, therefore, in nothing short of this; it is at the present moment freely offered to you, for whosoever will may now partake of like precious faith with Abraham, may

now be Abraham's child, and Abraham's heir; but the day is fast approaching to each of us, when these offers must cease; when the fountain opened on Calvary shall be sealed up; when the voice of the crier, "Ho! every one that thirsteth!" shall be quenched in silence; when the children of the promise shall enter their Father's house and gather round their Father's board, and delight themselves in their Father's society, and when the mocking Ishmaels, and the worldly-minded Esaus, shall be shut out for ever.

LECTURE XI.

GENESIS xxii. 8.

"AND ABRAHAM SAID, MY SON, GOD WILL PROVIDE HIMSELF A LAMB FOR A BURNT-OFFERING."

WE enter this morning upon the subject of Abraham's greatest and severest trial, the offering of his son, his long-promised and only son Isaac, at the command of his God. May every portion of this affecting and improving narrative be carried to our hearts, that, like him of whom we are about to speak, we may be taught by the Spirit of God, both to think nothing too dear, nothing too valuable, to be freely resigned at the desire of our heavenly Father; and to believe that no circumstances can be too dark,

none too difficult, for us to be guided by the Spirit, or delivered by the providence of the Lord Jehovah.

"It came to pass," says the inspired writer, "after these things, that God did tempt Abraham." After these things? After so many years of faithful following, and such close and intimate walking with God? Yes, the trials of the child of God end only with his life. Upon first entering upon the heavenward course, we are apt to imagine, a little more experience, a little more grace, and I shall be out of reach of these sins which now so easily beset me. Alas! as we move forward we find that although our trials and our temptations be changed, they are not destroyed; new enemies spring up around us, there are fresh struggles to be engaged in, fresh battles to be fought, fresh victories to be won. "Mortify therefore your members which are upon earth," your lusts, your passions, your desires, your tempers;

make this your daily, hourly occupation, the occupation from which you will find, and must desire to find, no respite here below; for if you "be not engaged in killing sin, sin will assuredly be engaged in killing you." You may indeed be dead with Christ, you may indeed have risen with him, yet "after these things" you will be just as continually exposed to the power of temptation as you were before. Sin will still be endeavouring to bring you under bondage to the power of the flesh; and though its efforts may be less conspicuous, and its temptations less gross, as the stillest waters are generally the deepest waters, it will be as dangerous and delusive as ever; and you must be as prayerful, as watchful, as continually upon your guard, as vigorous in your defence, after you have attained to the highest degree of spiritual knowledge, and spiritual love, as you were at the first trembling steps which led you to the foot of the cross. It is

true, you may now and then discover a green spot, and a shady resting-place in this wilderness state, but you will have scarcely begun to feel yourself at home there, to enlarge the place of your tent, to lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes," when the command will come to strike your tents and to move forward, to meet new difficulties and trials, until the desert be passed through, and the celestial city gained; enemies and temptations and sorrows assailing you every mile of the weary journey. If this appear to be a depressing picture of the Christian's course, we can not only say, that we believe it to be a true one, but that though true, we do not think it is a depressing picture; because the Christian's confidence does not, and must not flow from any assurance of the absence of temptation, but from the perfect reliance which he has in that Saviour who has promised to enable him to overcome: who has said,

"In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." He who overcame it in his own person, is daily engaged in overcoming it in the person of every one, even of the weakest and the frailest of his believing and obeying people; and not one of you whom I now address, if you are believing with a child-like dependance, that "He is faithful who has promised," and are following on to know the Lord, shall ultimately fall short of his great salvation.

"After these things God did tempt Abraham." To the youthful inquirer here is an apparent difficulty at the very threshold, and he naturally and fearfully asks, "If God become my tempter, how can I escape?" St. James, however, has plainly declared that this alarm is groundless: "Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man;" "but every

man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lusts and enticed." Now this cannot be said of Abraham in the example we are about to consider; therefore it is clear that in this acceptation of the word he was not tempted; all then that is intended by the expression may be seen from the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, where we read, "By faith Abraham, when he was TRIED, offered up Isaac;" he was therefore tried by the Almighty, not to satisfy him "to whom all hearts are open and from whom no secrets are hid," but to demonstrate to the Church of God, throughout all ages, the strength of Abraham's faith, and the reality of his devotedness to the Most High; to leave a lesson upon record which should be valuable to every future generation of believers, and which, by God's grace, will not be without its efficacy, even at the present hour, to you or to myself.

That we may be prepared duly to

estimate this most severe and urgent trial, we must remember Abraham's peculiar circumstances. He had been promised, and that at a time when both himself and his wife were childless, and in extreme old age, that he should become the father of a nation countless as the sands, and as the stars of heaven for multitude; and what was a still higher blessing, and a far nobler object to rest the fulness of his joy upon, that the promised seed of the woman which was to bruise the serpent's head, should spring from his loins, that in him all nations should be blessed. When the fulfilment of this prophecy had become impossible to mortal apprehension, Isaac, the promised son, was born, and all the doubts of Abraham were destroyed, and all his expectations realized. This then was the situation of the patriarch at the time of which we speak; a state of happiness deriving its strongest feelings of delight and joy from the one single pos-

session, and the astonishing anticipations involved in it, which it appeared to be the object of the present command of the Most High to frustrate and to dissipate for ever. "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." Nothing that could agonize the heart of him to whom it came was omitted in that dreadful sentence; "thy son," "thine only son:" "Isaac," that very name of happiness and joy, is recalled to the bleeding heart of the father—"Isaac, whom thou lovest," even him must thou sacrifice; him whom the expecting patriarch had been taught by God himself to view as the first link of that mighty chain which was to terminate in blessings innumerable and incalculable for the whole human race. How plausibly might he who had pleaded so powerfully with God in behalf of the righteous in Sodom,

"Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?—that be far from thee," have now argued in behalf of his guiltless child, "Wilt thou shed the innocent blood?—that be still farther from thee." But it was the direct word of the Almighty which required it, and this was sufficient to overrule every objection, and to silence every complaint.

My brethren, would you desire to form some little estimate of the reality and the strength of your own dependance upon God?—Then place yourself for a moment in a similar situation to that of the patriarch. Think for an instant of that person, of that object which you love the dearest, or regard the most devotedly upon earth; now let the breath of the destroying angel pass upon it, and behold it, like Jonah's gourd, lie withering at your feet—its beauty gone, its loveliness departed, every thing that engaged your thoughts and influenced your affections, for ever passed away, and the earth

speedily about to close over all that earth holds dear to you. Could you receive such a visitation as this, I do not say without a tear, but without a murmur, from the hands of your heavenly Father? Could you say with the Shunammite of old, in answer to the prophet's message, "Is it well with thy child?" that child which had just expired in her arms, could you reply with her, "It is well?" Could you say with holy Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord?" This is a portion of faith's most difficult work, to be "patient in tribulation," resigned, gratefully resigned to the will of God; and yet it has been achieved by thousands, must be achieved by you, ere "patience shall have had her perfect work," and your will have been brought into some blessed degree of conformity to the divine will. The most valuable of God's gifts, as well as the dearest of your own delights and gratifications, must all be held as Isaac in his father's

arms, ready to be laid, and at a single bidding to be sacrificed, upon the altar of your God.

Continuing the history, we read:—"Abraham rose up early in the morning and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for a burnt-offering, and rose up and went to the place of which God had told him." How valuable an instance of the immediate actings of a true and lively faith! The command was sent during the night, and it was obeyed early "in the morning." There was no doubtful question of its reality or its obligation; there was no guilty "communing with flesh and blood;" even Sarah was most probably not informed of it, lest her affections should be too strong for the patriarch's faith. Observe the importance of this example, my brethren, in innumerable instances in your own Christian course. Do you, for instance, find one line of conduct clearly

reprobated, and another as clearly recommended by the inspired word of our God? then resolve at once by his grace to forsake that which He condemns, and to follow that which He commands. Do not adopt that too common worldly policy of carrying your scruples to those who, you have reason to believe, will counsel you to disregard them; this is dealing dishonestly with God, with the convictions which his Spirit has implanted, and with your own souls. Be bold in your obedience. Be prompt in following the suggestions of an enlightened conscience, for they are emanations from the Spirit of God, and if you delay, the consequence generally is, that the Spirit is quenched and the heart is hardened; and who shall promise you that these blessed, these invaluable strivings with you shall ever return? In this, as in every other portion of your Christian life, "whatever your hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." For, alas! in how many in-

stances has the delay of a single day in acting faith upon the promises, or obeying the commandment of God, or accepting the offers of a Saviour, involved the loss of a boundless eternity!

Although Abraham was thus called upon to resolve instantly, the severity of the trial was unspeakably increased by the three days' journey between its commencement and its fulfilment. It was on the third day of this long and painful travel, and when approaching nearly to its conclusion, that Isaac asked the affecting question which produced the answer of the text; for we read that while he was accompanying Abraham and carrying the wood for the altar, he said, "Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?" How keenly must this inquiry have put the faith of Abraham to the test! "If," as Bishop Hall beautifully remarks,[1] "if Abraham's heart could have known how to relent,

[1] Bishop Hall's Works, p. 14, fol.

that question of his dear, innocent, and religious son had melted it into compassion. 'My father, behold the fire and the wood, but where is the sacrifice?' I know not whether that word, 'my father,' did not strike Abraham as deep as the knife of Abraham could strike his son: yet doth he not so much as think, still he persists and conceals, and, where he meant not, prophesies, 'My son, God will provide a lamb for the burnt-offering.'"

In proceeding with the narrative, we read in the 9th verse, "And they came to the place which God had told him of, and Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order; and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand and took the knife to slay his son." Here was the completion of Abraham's obedience and of his faith; anything short of this, and all would have been unavailing; this last, this agonizing moment, when the knife was taken and

the hand outstretched to strike, consummated the trial and bequeathed the faith of Abraham to the church of God as the least imperfect model which mere mortality has ever offered it. Then, and not till then, did the Almighty interfere: then did Abraham hear those blessed words, "Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him, for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing that thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up instead of his son."

Thus, my brethren, it was demonstrated that the faith and trust of Abraham were not ill-founded; he trusted in God that he would provide, and God did provide at the very moment when human aid, and human forethought, and human power, were utterly incompetent

and unavailable. Rightly, therefore, did he name that place "Jehovah Jireh:" "The Lord will provide," or, "In the mount the Lord shall be seen." In the hour of extremest difficulty the Lord shall appear for me. How astonishing are the ways of God, and his works past finding out! Never does the Lord make bare his arm with such merciful and wonderful effect as when the arm of flesh faileth. Thus has it ever been; with Joseph and with Gideon, and with Noah, and with Daniel, and with Job, and with all the believers and saints of old; and thus it is even now, according to that most true proverb, "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." This is not a matter of mere faith; it is to many of you a matter of positive and frequent experience. In the day of sorrow have you not been comforted and supported by the power and presence of God, when no mortal comforter could alleviate your distresses? On the bed of sickness,

when every hope has vanished, when friends and relatives have begun to speak of you rather as those who have been, than those who are; when the efforts of science were at an end, and her most skilful followers had no counsel to offer, then has the thought, that "God will provide," brought peace and consolation to your hearts; then has the good Physician manifested his power and love, and more than fulfilled your most anxious expectation, and shown that "what is impossible with man is possible with God." And as in temporal, so in spiritual difficulties, the Lord has indeed provided abundantly above all that you are able to ask or think. Have you never felt so oppressed with the burthen of sin that you knew not where to look, or whither to fly for refuge—life has become irksome, and the thoughts of eternity terrible? Here again the Lord has provided, and by leading you to the knowledge of a merciful and tender Re-

deemer, he has restored a peace to your bosom of which neither Satan nor the world shall ever permanently deprive you.

What then ought to be the effect of these repeated interferences of divine mercy in your behalf? Surely to teach you never to doubt, never to despair, never to despond. If you are visited with the severest trials, to feel assured that they are as much the fruits of your heavenly Father's love, as his more obvious blessings. If you are called to give up your dearest possession, the wife of your bosom, the children of your love, to be content, even amidst nature's keenest sufferings, to kiss the rod, and Him who appointed it. If you are called away from them instead of they from you, while you behold those around your bed who will soon be unprotected and helpless orphans, still, even in this darkest hour of nature's woe, to remember with confidence, "God will

provide," and to trust implicitly to Him who said, "Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive: and let the widows trust in me."

So far, then, from these being the moments to doubt the love or tenderness of your heavenly Father, these are the times when they shine with the most resplendent lustre. But why is it that God loves thus to appear in your most urgent need, and at your most pressing extremity? It is that you who are really his children may learn not to limit your view of his infinite power and mercy to what the eye of reason can discern in present appearances, or even to what the eye of faith can distinguish in God's recorded promises. He is anxious that you should trust Him far, far beyond all that can be brought within the scope of the most extended vision; that you may know that you possess a resource more abundant, a fountain of good whose waters stand more deep and flow more widely than

either reason, or even faith itself can fathom, in the ALL-SUFFICIENCY of God. When every particular attribute of God fails you, when you are driven to such utter extremity that the panting soul cannot venture to believe that the love of God, or the forbearance of God, or the faithfulness of God is sufficient to reach his case; then does the ALL-SUFFICIENCY of God, in whom you trust, stand out in letters of light, which even the closing eye can read, and the fainting heart can dwell upon; then can you still hope, still struggle on, still feel assured that He who has been able and willing to provide for you in time, is as able and as willing to provide for you in eternity.

My Christian brethren, strive to appreciate this blessed view of the all-sufficiency of Him in whom you have believed. Delightful as it is in our emergencies to apply the express promises of God, and they are "exceeding great and precious," to our souls, there

is something more delightful in this which embraces all promises. Many have known the time—you whom I address may know it—when the languid frame and the baffled spirit are incapable of recalling a single definite declaration, a single promise, with sufficient distinctness of apprehension, to rest the troubled soul upon. Oh! at such an hour how blessed is the thought that you have to deal with an ALL-SUFFICIENT Comforter, —an ALL-SUFFICIENT Saviour,—an ALL-SUFFICIENT God! In the application of a particular promise of God you may be mistaken; in this simple dependance upon his all-sufficiency you never can. Therefore, in your extremest difficulties, and troubles, and trials, cast yourself in the full assurance of faith upon this infinite ocean, and you are safe. To adopt the beautiful language of an old divine, "If we could in all our trials lay ourselves down in these arms of the Almighty, his all-sufficiency in power and

goodness, how much of the haven should we have in our voyage, how much of home in our pilgrimage, how much of heaven in this wretched earth! Friends, throw away your staves, break the arm of flesh, lie down here quietly in every dispensation, and you shall see the salvation of God."

LECTURE XII.

GENESIS XXV. 8.

"THEN ABRAHAM GAVE UP THE GHOST, AND DIED IN A GOOD OLD AGE, AN OLD MAN, AND FULL OF YEARS: AND WAS GATHERED TO HIS PEOPLE."

WE this morning arrive at the conclusion of the history in which we have now for some time past been engaged, and desire to offer our sincere and hearty thanksgivings to Almighty God for such a measure of divine assistance as He has been mercifully pleased to supply. The closing years of life are usually not unaccompanied by warnings or by trials. The companions of our youth, the friends of our maturer age, the near connexions who have gladdened life, and the beloved relatives who have endeared it, fall

around us, and they who live to approach the scriptural limit of the days of the years of man, often find themselves, even amongst the thickest throngs of earth, solitary and deserted, their contemporaries removed, while they themselves remain as the "shaking of the olive-tree or the gleanings of grapes when the vintage is done."

The patriarch who forms the subject of our history, was not exempted from these trials which mingle in the common lot of all mortality. At the opening of the 23d chapter, we read of the death of his beloved wife Sarah, with whom he had enjoyed a remarkable degree of peace and happiness, during a longer period than that of which a whole life, at the present day usually consists. Yet, long as this delightful relationship had been permitted to continue, it was now drawn to a close, and Sarah was removed to that blessed world, "where they neither marry, nor are given in marriage."

There is something in the breaking of this tie more affecting perhaps to the human heart than in the disruption of any other which unites us to our fellow-pilgrims in our passage through this world of sorrow; perhaps because the tie itself, when existing between the children of God, is the sweetest and most valuable, as well as the most ancient which God has appointed in the world; having been, as our Church truly declares, "instituted of God in the time of man's innocency," before he had been ruined by transgression, and debased by sin; "signifying unto us the mystical union between Christ and his Church," a peculiarly beautiful feature in the marriage tie, and which gives it a remarkable precedency over all others.

Abraham had by the good providence of God, enjoyed this state under its most auspicious aspect, and deeply indeed does he appear to have felt its termination; for we are told, and it is the only instance

in which the mourning for a wife is recorded in the history of the patriarchs, that he came "to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her." Sarah is always spoken of in Scripture, as the pattern of conjugal fidelity and love: her example is held forth by the apostle as the highest model for Christian women, and the title of her "daughters," as their most honourable distinction. The very fact, that so few of the incidents of her history are recorded speak strongly in her favour, for there is little in the even tenour of female life, when that life is passed in the unobtrusive and noiseless path of devotedness to God, and in the peaceful round of domestic duties, which can, or ought to form the subject of the chronicler. The very privacy of the Christian graces, manifested in such a walk and conversation, endears them the more to the few who have the opportunity of intimately knowing their value, and daily

and hourly appreciating their loveliness and worth.

To you, my brethren, who are at present living in the enjoyment of that great blessing, for the deprivation of which Abraham was now called to "mourn and to weep," viz., a truly godly union, allow me to offer a few words of exhortation.—Although you may live together long, and happily, and uninterruptedly, the time must arrive when you shall part: the day must come when you shall separate, though it be but for a time, from all whom you have loved and cherished here below; let me then urge you so to live in the exercise of all the daily and hourly duties of that important and valuable relationship, as you will, upon that parting day, desire that you had lived. When the companion of years of trial, or of years of happiness, is taken from you, every accident and every incident of your married life will pass before you;

trifles forgotten now, will be well remembered then; every unkind word, or ungenerous thought, or hasty and irritable expression, will return upon your mind, and you will "write bitter things" against yourself for every deed which partook, however transiently, of unkindly feeling, or however slightly, of want of affectionate tenderness and love. There will be pangs sufficiently deep, and piercing, and heart-rending at that hour, without these evil additions. Be warned, therefore now, while warnings may be useful, to live as they should live who are partakers of the same hope, of "the mind which was in Christ Jesus," of "the communion of the Holy Ghost."

Endeavour to enjoy as much of spiritual intercourse together—the Lord's house, the Lord's word, the Lord's supper, private reading and prayer—as your time and opportunity will permit. Nothing will, through divine grace, tend so much to hallow the flame of wedded love, as to

rekindle it daily at the altar of your God. Let "the love of Christ constrain you," not merely in the important affairs of life, but in all its thousand lesser communings, that your daily intercourse may be pure, peaceable, gentle; that however the storm may rage abroad, there may be a holy calm at home, which, like the still water in some secure and sheltered anchorage, remains the very picture of repose, while all beyond is hurricane and storm. Remember that the time is hastening on, when it will be too late to recall what is past, or to compensate for former neglects by future attention; the time when, however holily and happily you may have lived together, however sure and certain your mutual hope may be of a re-union on the morning of the resurrection, you will be called, like Abraham, to "mourn and weep" for the departed here below; —again, then, I say, be not preparing poison for the barbed arrows of that hour of darkness. Live as those who

are to part, that so you may part as those who are to live together throughout eternity.

The inspired historian having recorded Abraham's grief for Sarah, continues, "And Abraham stood up from before his dead," having probably been prostrate from the extremity of his anguish, "and spake unto the sons of Heth, saying, I am a stranger and a sojourner with you; give me a possession of a burying-place with you that I may bury my dead out of my sight." He was unwilling to sorrow as one without hope, and therefore, having indulged his grief, as a Christian may and ought to indulge it, for we must not "despise the chastenings of the Lord," his next act was to obtain a burying-place. How affecting is the consideration!—We have now been tracing the history of Abraham during one hundred years, throughout the greater portion of which, the promise of God was pledged to him, that all the land of Canaan should be his,

and here we find him, at the close of a long and toilsome life, obtaining his first inheritance in it, and that—a sepulchre for his wife!

How often does the Almighty in his providence, render the very possession which we have laboured for with the greatest perseverance, looked to with the deepest anxiety, and expected with the most joyous anticipations, the grave of all our hopes, and all our earthly happiness! Blessed is the man who at such a crisis can say, "Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight!"

Abraham's confession, true at all times, was peculiarly striking and true, when he thus uttered it at the grave of Sarah: "I am a stranger and a sojourner with you." Never do we feel such full conviction of this great truth, never do we feel the ties which bind us down to earth so loosened, so nearly rent asunder, as when we stand by the grave of those we love. However at other and happier

times we forget the poor frail tenure by which we hold this earthly tabernacle, we are strongly impressed with its conviction then. We then, indeed, "know the heart of a stranger," and wonder that we have ever felt domesticated here on earth, where there is so much of sin, so much of suffering, so little of stability and peace. Would that we could carry the constant conviction of the same great truth with us into all the daily business of life; how little influence would its trials and disappointments possess over us, how much internal peace would it bestow, if we could really feel that these things might be grievous to a resident, or a native, but that we are "strangers and pilgrims," and shall soon, amid the comforts of our Father's house, smile at all these little disquietudes of the way.

The whole transaction of Abraham's honourable and high-minded purchase of the sepulchre, which is related in the remainder of the chapter, is a beautiful

specimen of patriarchal times and patriarchal simplicity. But we must hasten to the close of the history. There is, however, yet one circumstance of importance which marked the declining years of the pious patriarch, and is too beautifully told in the book of inspiration to be related in any other language but its own. "And Abraham was old and well stricken in years, and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh; and I will make thee swear by the Lord, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell; but thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac. And the servant said, Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land; must I needs bring thy son again

unto the land from whence thou camest? And Abraham said unto him, Beware thou that thou bring not my son thither again. The Lord God of heaven, which took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land; he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence; and if the woman will not be willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath, only bring not my son thither again. And the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and sware to him concerning that matter." With the remainder of the story we have at present no concern, for it belongs to the history of Isaac; but of this, the last great transaction in the life of Abraham, the last words of his which have been bequeathed to the Church of God, it is impossible not to speak.

How striking is the manner in which

this pious parent deprecates the probability of his son either forming an ungodly connexion, or returning to the land of idolatry from which he had himself been called! What would all the wealth of Canaan have profited for a dowry, if the bride should bring with her the example and the sin and the curse of Canaan? What would all that God had done for him during his own life, by so remarkable and merciful a train of providences, and all that He had promised to him in the glorious future, have availed, if the beloved Isaac should fall back into the darkness of those who knew not God? How earnestly does he impress upon the mind of his faithful servant the most anxious solicitude upon this important point! "BEWARE THOU THAT THOU BRING NOT MY SON THITHER AGAIN." Twice is this most emphatically repeated in these short directions; the very last words of Abraham which the Spirit of God has recorded, are the reiteration of this

solemn counsel, "ONLY BRING NOT MY SON THITHER AGAIN."

You, my brethren, who are parents, and whom it has pleased God, by his sovereign grace, to gather out of the world of the ungodly, let me urge you to inquire, are you evincing the same holy anxiety with regard to your children? Is it your daily effort as well as your constant prayer, that they may not be unnecessarily exposed to the temptations of a world from which you have yourselves in some degree escaped? Alas! even among religious parents, how much inconsistency do we see upon this point! How often are their children permitted to mingle in a society, to partake of pleasures, to visit scenes, from which they themselves would shrink! How often, for the questionable purpose of forming what are denominated good connexions, are they sent to places of education, where the wise man's declaration, that "the fear of God is the beginning

of wisdom," is exactly reversed, and every species of wisdom inculcated, while the fear of God is left to be taught at some future time and at some other place! Christian mothers, be not too backward in declaring your real feelings upon these subjects. If the Spirit of God have taught you to see the guilt and danger of thus exposing the young minds of your dear children to such fearful contaminations, you cannot discharge your own consciences, you cannot clear your own souls, without earnestly and prayerfully endeavouring to rescue them. If you fail, after having, in humble dependance upon divine strength, made the attempt, you may then take comfort from the reflection, that "the grace of God is not bound," but, sought by a mother's prayers, will accompany your children into the furnace, and bring them uninjured from its flames. But you can take no comfort from this thought if you stand faithlessly by, and suffer them to be

placed there without one resisting word, one affectionate entreaty, one fervent prayer. You do not know, until you have made the effort, how often, like Jacob of old, you will have power with God, and he will enable you to prevail. If one of your little ones be missing on the great day of account, how will you acquit yourselves, if every plea have not now been urged, every entreaty used, every effort made, to keep them from the snares of the destroyer?

The last scene of Abraham's life, at which we have now arrived, is thus briefly narrated by the inspired historian. "These are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived, one hundred, threescore, and fifteen years. Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years, and was gathered to his people. And his sons, Isaac and Ishmael, buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron, the field which

Abraham purchased of the sons of Heth: there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife."

One hundred and seventy-five years in duration, therefore, was the life of Abraham; one hundred years of which he had spent as a stranger in a strange land. How little is there in the most prosperous life, when viewed from its close, to form the subject of a moment's envy! Abraham's chiefest happiness was this—not that he was favoured with a remarkable abundance of this world's good, and with an unusual term of years to enjoy it, but, as the apostle says, that "he was called the friend of God." How blessed then is the consideration, that although neither the riches nor the years of Abraham are within your reach, this, his highest honour and his noblest title, is offered as freely to the poorest and lowliest among you, as to the patriarch himself! Would you also be the friend of God, then remember the words of inspiration—

"Know ye, that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham; so then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham," *i.e.*, be partakers of the same blessed faith, believers, loving, obedient believers, in the same Saviour, and you shall not only inherit the same title, but the same eternity.

Doubtless it would have been most gratifying, had the Spirit of God thought good to have handed down to us some longer memorial of the death of the eminent and far-famed subject of our history; most instructive would it have been to have stood in imagination by the side of his dying bed, and to have heard those assurances which he doubtless gave to his beloved son, of the mercy and faithfulness of Him in whom he had believed, who had led him through the mazes of so long a pilgrimage with so much of peacefulness and comfort. Or if this had been denied us, it would

have been some little compensation to have overheard, as it were, but a broken sentence, as in the case of Jacob, of those secret communings which were passing, in the very hours of nature's dissolution, between God and his soul. "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord." Nothing of this, however, has been vouchsafed in the instance before us, and, except for the purpose of our gratification, nothing of this was needed. After such a life of faith and holiness, there is small need of inquiring what was the death. We know that it could not have been otherwise than full of peace and hope. It is sufficient that the inspired historian tells us, "He was gathered to his people;" not as regarded the body, for, with the exception of Sarah, Abraham's "people" were at Charran, while his remains were deposited in the land of Canaan; but he was gathered to his people when his spirit ascended to those realms whither all the

believing people of all preceding ages, who had died in the same faith, and been rendered meet for the same inheritance, had taken up their blissful abode.

Yes, my brethren, it is a solemn consideration, not to be too hastily dismissed, that the day of death will be to all of us the day of "gathering to our people;" the scoffer to the scoffers, the ungodly to the godless, the profane to the profane, according to our Lord's directions in his well-known parable of the tares and the wheat, "Bind them in BUNDLES to burn them." While on the other hand the believer will be gathered into the company of believers, and will sit down with the children of God for ever. Remember, then, in choosing your friends and your associates here, that you are choosing them for eternity, and that death is merely the signal for gathering you to them, to part no more.

If the word of God be silent upon the

particulars of Abraham's death, it is—and this is almost the only recorded instance—singularly communicative upon what happened after death; for we find the Almighty declaring to Moses at the burning bush, more than three hundred years after, "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob;" and our Lord's own comment upon this is, "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living," while in the only parable which has ever drawn aside the veil from the unseen world, the father of the faithful is represented to us as enjoying the fulness of pleasure at God's right hand; while, to be "in Abraham's bosom," is the language by which our Lord expresses the highest degree of heavenly blessedness and everlasting joy.

May we, my beloved brethren, be daily ripening for that coming hour and that blessed inheritance! May we be ready to confess and to feel with Abraham, that

we are "strangers and pilgrims on the earth," "desiring a better country, even an heavenly!" Then will God not be ashamed to be called our God: then, when our "heart and our flesh fail us, will God be the strength of our heart, and our portion for ever."

THE END.

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